Interview with L. Michael Rives

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

L. MICHAEL RIVES

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is July 25, 1995. This is an interview with Michael Rives on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

Thank you very much for coming all the way down from Boston. I'm glad we have a chance to catch you here. I wonder if we could start with a bit about where you were born and when, and a bit about your background.

RIVES: I was born in New York City in 1921, brought up in New Jersey, and went to Princeton University.

Q: Tell me a bit about your family.

RIVES: My grandfather on my mother's side was Whitney Warren, who built Grand Central Station and a few other buildings, and my grandfather on my father's side was a sportsman, President of the Coaching Club of America for many years. My father was a broker, and that's about it.

Q: Before you went to Princeton, did you go to...

RIVES: St George's School in Newport, Rhode Island.

Q: And you entered Princeton when?

RIVES: 1940.

Q: 1940 was a good year! Were you interested at all, and had you done any traveling, or anything like that?

RIVES: Well, as a child, we used to go to Europe every summer until the Depression. After that we went to Canada, where we had a cabin.

Q: When you entered Princeton in 1940 did you have any feel for the Foreign Service?

RIVES: Absolutely not. I didn't have a clue what I was going to do. I majored in modern languages.

Q: What language?

RIVES: French.

Q: I take it that events beyond the ken of Princeton overtook your academic career?

RIVES: I left in '41 after finishing my freshman year and joined the Marines and served with them until '45.

Q: I think it's important for people who are looking at this in later years, [wondering], "Who are these Foreign Service people?" to understand a bit about their background. Your generation was very heavily affected by World War II. Could you tell me where you served and what you were doing?

RIVES: I joined, as I say, the Marine Corps, and I was assigned, finally, to the First Marine Division and landed on Tulagi and Guadalcanal, went to Australia on R&R, then went to the New Britain campaign.

Q: You went through the whole New Britain campaign with the First Division?

RIVES: Yes.

Q: Did this make you lust for the South Pacific Islands?

RIVES: Not at all!

Q: What was your position, what were you doing? Were you a rifleman...?

RIVES: I was a Private to start with, and I came out a Second Lieutenant. After New Britain they sent me back home, and I went to V-12 in Princeton, so I caught up a year there, and graduated in '47 as a civilian.

Q: In 1947 did you, again... You had seen the glories of Guadalcanal and New Britain, two lush islands in the South Pacific...

RIVES: I saw an advertisement for the Foreign Service Exam, not having really a clue what I wanted to do, and I took them and, to my happy surprise, passed them.

Q: Had you known anybody in the Foreign Service, anybody in Princeton...?

RIVES: No.

Q: That was an era when a lot of people from Princeton were in the Foreign Service.

RIVES: That's right, and most of them went to Woodrow Wilson School, which I didn't.

Q: Was there an oral exam...?

RIVES: Yes.

Q: I'm trying to capture a period of time... Can you tell me a bit about the oral exam? Do you remember anything about it?

RIVES: I took the writtens in '47 and then the orals in '48, I guess it was, and passed them, but I must say, they were very simple. They weren't really very serious, I don't think. I was asked when was the last time I'd been drunk, and what were the four languages of Switzerland, where they knew I had lived as a child. But I had the right sponsors, I think... Somebody was very kind to me.

Q: I think they were looking at people's military record and all that and weren't getting very precious about it...

RIVES: One of my sponsors was Ambassador Norman Armour, Sr., one of my father's friends.

Q: He was Latin America? Oh, he was all over the place.

RIVES: Yes. All over.

Q: Was there the equivalent to a basic officer's course when you came in?

RIVES: There was in theory. We started it, but then they rushed us. I didn't get appointed 'till 1950, and they were desperate for visa officers in the DP program in Germany, so they shot us over there.

Q: So where did you go?

RIVES: Frankfurt.

Q: That was my first assignment. I was in the Refugee Relief Program, which was exactly the same thing... Can you talk a bit about how you saw Germany in 1950?

RIVES: Being completely new to the Foreign Service, and never having been in Germany before, I was fascinated by it, especially the destruction still visible after the War. I was very fortunate, though, because three of us were sent to a little DP camp in Butzbach, which was north of Frankfurt, but we lived in Bad-Nauheim in the Kaiserhof Hotel, which was very nice.

Q: Ah, yes, this was a cohort (?) of...

RIVES: That's right, a really tough place. That was interesting. I served there, and went to Berlin for DP on TDY, and to Austria..., places like that.

Q: Tell me about the Displaced Persons Program. What were you looking at, and can you tell some of the types of people you were dealing with?

RIVES: Well, all types. A lot of them, of course, were Jewish refugees, but there were all sorts of other types also. What we mainly were doing, we were trying to stop Nazis from sneaking in, and there were plenty who tried that. Well, we just did the usual thing. They all had sponsors, mostly religious groups, who sponsored them entering the U.S.

Q: How did you find out the background of these people?

RIVES: The Germans were terribly well organized. I suppose they still are today. In Berlin they had the Document Center...

Q: The Berlin Document Center, yes.

RIVES: They had files on absolutely everybody, you can imagine. That was the basic document we had.

Q: Did you feel while you were working on the DP program that you were under any particular pressure... were there Congressional cases saying why weren't you doing this or that, or...

RIVES: Only one that I was involved in.

Q: What was that?

RIVES: I went to Berlin. The lady in charge of the Jewish Refugees Program—HIAS—as I recall was a Jewish lady, a refugee. She applied under the refugee program and I refused her, because (I must say I was very young)... she had been hidden by her husband all during the War (he was a very prominent German doctor), so she had never been persecuted or in a concentration camp, fortunately for her. I thought she should go to the United States as an ordinary immigrant, if she wanted to go, since she hadn't suffered. So I turned her down.

I flew back to Frankfurt and went into the Consulate, where I was told to report immediately to the Consul General's office, who by that time had already been contacted by Washington, who had been contacted by Berlin at the highest level. He said to me, “Sign.” And I said, “No.” So he signed. He said, “You're young, so I'll let you get away with this.” My first experience with pressure.

Q: Good training in American politics!

You were in Frankfurt, then, from 1950 until...?

RIVES: Just till 1951, then I transferred to Bonn.

Q: What were you doing in Bonn?

RIVES: I was with George West in the contractual negotiations for independence.

Q: Had Germany gone through its Verschafst, Wunder, and all that?

RIVES: No, no, it was still Occupation. The contractual agreements I was working on took effect just after I left, in '52.

Q: Did you get any feel for negotiations?

RIVES: Not very much. I was so junior... I was doing bio-reporting on the various officials we were dealing with, and that sort of thing.

Q: Then after this experience they wanted to put you in Asia again, I guess.

RIVES: Yes, in Hanoi.

Q: You were in Hanoi from 1952 until when?

RIVES: '53, I think it was. About a year.

Q: Would you describe Hanoi at that period?

RIVES: It was a city that was beginning to be under siege. There was actually no shelling as such. You could hear it all day and all night, and the French were gradually being beaten back. There, again, I was a junior officer, a junior Vice Consul. I was in charge of visas and that kind of thing. I also did reporting on the Chinese in North Vietnam. It was an attractive city, basically, like so many of the cities developed by the French. It had broad boulevards. The Consulate, I must say, was perfectly beautiful. We had one of the best houses in Hanoi, the ground floor being the Consulate itself, and myself and another vice consul occupied the top floor. It was really very pleasant.

Q: Who was the Consul?

RIVES: Paul Sturm.

Q: Did you have much contact with the French while you were there?

RIVES: Oh, we dealt almost entirely with the French, because they were really in control.

Q: How did they look on America at that time?

RIVES: Well, I think they were torn. We were supporting them quite strongly in those days, and so, obviously, they appreciated that, until we turned them down on Dien Bien Phu.

Q: The Korean War was going full force then, too.

RIVES: Yes, it was.

Q: Was there concern that the Chinese, having entered in the north, might also enter [the conflict in Vietnam?]

RIVES: Yes and no. I don't know if the French really worried about that much. I was fortunate enough, once, to take a trip to the last French outpost on the Chinese border. It really was fascinating, to sort of sneak up there at night, and then spend a day there. It was commanded by a Vietnamese colonel in the French army who was famous, because he was a real character. On Sunday morning, we woke up to band music. We looked out and saw the regimental band playing light music, like waltzes and such, as they would have played in the nineteenth century in France. When he went out on patrol (he would always go out), he would fly his flag, and as he approached each Chinese post on the other side of the frontier, they would lower their flags in salute, because they knew who it was. In the end, they were beaten, but he was a real character.

Q: In your year in Hanoi, '53, did you have any contact with Vietnamese officials, or were there any Vietnamese officials?

RIVES: There were a few, but most of the Vietnamese I dealt with were people like our landlord.

Q: What was the general feeling in the Consulate concerning the Viet Minh? Who were they, and what did we think about them?

RIVES: We thought that everybody around us was Viet Minh, actually. We had a wonderful chef in our apartment over the Consulate. We also had a perfectly gorgeous Vietnamese girl who took care of us but who was married to a man we were all convinced was a Viet Minh. We had no proof of that.

Q: Were any Americans targets of the Viet Minh?

RIVES: No, not while I was there.

Q: Was Ho Chi Minh a person one thought about?

RIVES: Yes, but at that time, as far as I was concerned, we followed the line, which was that Ho Chi Minh was bad, etcetera, etcetera... I don't think we had realized yet that he was a communist but not a “real” communist, so to speak.

Q: Did you travel out in the countryside?

RIVES: Oh, you couldn't go out very far. Too dangerous. We used to go out and visit the occasional Foreign Legion post on the outskirts of town, things like that, but we'd have to be back in before dark.

Q: Did this make you feel, a bit, like you were under siege?

RIVES: Oh, yes. Definitely. Oh, yes.

Q: Where did you go to get out?

RIVES: We flew to Hong Kong, although Consul Sturm did not approve of anybody getting leave. In the year I got one brief weekend there.

Q: Good God! This was your first smaller post... How did Consul Sturm operate.

RIVES: He was a brilliant political officer, bilingual in French, but "...as an administrator... [he was] absolutely hopeless." I am quoting Ambassador Donald Heath's remarks on my efficiency report, which were very bad by Paul Sturm, but Mr. Heath saved me by that kind of remark.

Q: What was your impression of the French military?

RIVES: They were good. Just to meet them like that... I don't know what you'd call them, exactly, compared to the American military. I wouldn't have said they were as organized as we were. They were a really gung ho bunch, and actually, most of them in the Hanoi area that I met were professionals. I met the officers and, of course, the Foreign Legion, people like that. They had all sorts of odd people.

Q: What did we have in Hanoi... well, it would have to have been a Consulate at that time. Did we have anything in Saigon?

RIVES: Yes, there was a full embassy in Saigon which supervised all three countries, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Q: Did you go down there at all?

RIVES: Well, I stopped there on the way to Hanoi, but I didn't go back there again until I was transferred to Laos as Charg#, and then I went back.

Q: Sounds like they really kept you trapped!

RIVES: Yes, pretty much.

Q: What were the visa matters.

RIVES: A few Vietnamese tried to go the U.S., occasionally, and some Chinese. But they'd have to have pretty legitimate reasons [to be approved] to go. A lot of them were trying to get out, you know, that kind of thing.

Q: Were there any Americans there who were having problems?

RIVES: I can't remember any Americans there except at the Consulate and the AID mission — we had an AID officer — but that was all.

Q: After you left Hanoi, you went to Vientiane in Laos. You were there from '53 to '55? That must have seemed like the end of the world, didn't it?

RIVES: Yes, but it was fascinating, because it was a one-man post when I was there. I was the only American in Laos. So I dealt with the prime minister and the king, and everybody else. It was a lot of fun. Ambassador Heath, of course, was still the nominal [U.S. Government representative]. It was a legation in those days. Ambassador Heath came up once a year or so, or when we had important visitors.

Q: Can we talk about Laos at this time?

RIVES: Yes. It was a fascinating country. Completely undeveloped. It was involved in the Vietnam War, of course. I was there during the Dien Bien Phu defeat in Vietnam, in 1954, I guess it was. The French considered trying to send a relief column from Laos to Dien Bien Phu. But they just didn't have enough men and couldn't get it organized.

It was fascinating because, as I say, I dealt with everything by myself, the one-time pads and everything else.

Q: “One-time pads,” for the record, being a primitive coding device.

RIVES: The most secure in the world...

Then I would have visits, occasionally. Senator Mansfield came twice and stayed with me. That was always one of his real interests, Southeast Asia. Then we had regular visits from the CINCPAC. He used to come out very regularly. The French Commander was a colonel by the name of de Crevecoeur, who later became a General. I considered him absolutely brilliant, and he was very nice... he and the General used to have a wonderful time together. I was the interpreter because one couldn't speak French and the other one couldn't speak English. The only thing that came out of their visits was agreement to disagree. Of course, the American wanted to “sweep up” the Indochina peninsula, shoulder to shoulder, towards China, and the French believed in small-scale operations.

Q: What was your impression of the royal family in Laos at that time?

RIVES: The king was very old. I didn't see him often. The crown prince was very impressive. He was very well educated, in France, of course, and was a very commanding, very handsome person. I remember one of my British colleagues took him to London, I think it was perhaps for the coronation of the queen... could it have been? Or some other important occasion. As he told me, the crown prince just floored them all, he was so outstanding. He was big, not at all like most Laotians, tall, and very handsome. Then there was Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, whom I admired very much, in spite of the CIA. The Laotians themselves couldn't have been nicer, but completely feckless.

What they did in the military, Colonel de Crevecoeur explained to me, they would volunteer for the army or the navy (they had little patrol boats), and they thought that was great because they had free uniforms, free food. But then they'd get bored and desert. Or they'd go back and pick up the rice crop. And then, maybe six months later, they'd volunteer for the Air Force or something like that. The Colonel said they never knew how many men they had, because they could be [counting the] same men twice. They didn't fight very well at all. When they had to fight, the Colonel explained to me, they'd put the Legion behind

them, the Moroccans on the left and the Algerians on the right, and if they hesitated, they'd just shoot them down, so they fought.

Q: This, of course, was very much a colonial period...

What was the situation in Laos? Was the Pathet Lao or were the Vietnamese... what was happening there?

RIVES: You had the Viet Minh on the borders, and you had the local communist party, headed by the prime minister's half brother. Again, it was not a country you could travel around in very freely. You could go out in the country up to a point, but you had to be careful.

Q: How "communist" did we consider the prime minister's brother?

RIVES: Oh, I think he was a pretty devoted communist. He was a Laotian, but he was a communist.

Q: Were there any American interests in Laos at that time?

RIVES: As such, I don't think so. There was the British-American Tobacco Company; I'm not quite sure if that's considered British or American. They had a plantation there, and a lot of the tobacco was shipped to the U.S.

Q: How did the fall of Dien Bien Phu play in Laos? Did you see a change?

RIVES: No. Not outwardly. Obviously, the French were crushed by it, you know. It disappointed the military. But other than that there was not much...

Q: What did you do as a one-man post there?

RIVES: I kept in touch with the French particularly, and the Laotians, did political reporting, and did military reporting. I knew all the attach#s in Saigon, because I would give them

what de Crevecoeur would tell me. He was quite honest, I must say, with me. The military in Saigon didn't always agree with the French view of things, so it was amusing that way.

Q: When you left there, did you see Laos ever becoming the center of attention it did a few years later?

RIVES: No. Well, while I was there, [Washington] finally sent people from the CIA, and I had two public affairs officers. Then Charles Yost took my place, as resident minister, and with him came a secretary. After that it got out of control.

Q: Later the CIA practically took over the American mission...

RIVES: Well, this is my own opinion, not being there at the time... I'm sorry to say I think they pulled the wool over Ambassador Yost's eyes. They had gotten rid of Souvanna Phouma, threw him out, and got this awful Captain Phoumi Nosavan in there instead, who was a disaster of the first order.

Q: I'm trying to get a feeling for how things operated at that time. Did our military attach#s or CIA people come in from time to time to sort of "sound the waters?"

RIVES: Well, I didn't have any military when I was there. They'd come from Saigon once in a while. I did have a permanent CIA man there, whom I had removed because I found he was spying on me.

Q: What was the problem?

RIVES: Well, we shared a filing cabinet at one time, when he first got there, before his own things came. One day I went down there... his drawer was open, and I did something which I shouldn't have done, but the yellow pad was sitting there, and I read it. It was a report about me, which they weren't allowed to do, were not supposed to do, and swore

they never did. So I said to the Ambassador in Saigon, “Either he goes or I go.” So he went. Mr. Yost wouldn't believe that when I told him.

Q: You left there when? In '55?

RIVES: Early '55.

Q: Then you went where?

RIVES: Guatemala.

Q: Wow!

RIVES: Ambassador Norman Armour was ambassador, and he asked for me, but by the time I got there, he'd been transferred.

Q: So there you were in Guatemala! You served there from when to when?

RIVES: '55 to '57.

Q: What was your impression of Guatemala at the time? This was the Eisenhower period...

RIVES: It was a period of calm in Guatemala. Peurifoy had managed to throw out Arbenz... Castillo Armas was President. My impression was that he was trying to do fairly well. Ambassador Sparks, who was my Ambassador, was in touch with him a great deal. Things were relatively calm.

One of my duties—I was junior officer in the Political Section—was to be plot officer. I received anybody who had any plot. My instructions from the Ambassador were to never nod or shake my head, because no matter what I did, they would take it to mean the U.S. Government would support it. So about once a month he would be called in by the President, Castillo Armas, who read off the names of all the people who were coming to

see us. And the Ambassador could honestly say, “My God! I know nothing about it; I don't have anything to do with it.”

Q: Who were these plotters?

RIVES: Every kind used to come in. Some were deliberately sent in there to see if the U.S. were playing games, that sort of thing. They'd come in, they'd talk round about how bad the government was, the need for change, that sort of thing, and see the reaction of the Americans.

Q: So you learned how to keep a real poker face?

RIVES: That's right. I also was in charge of biographic reporting, for which I got a commendation, thanks to the senior local employee in the visa section, who came from one of the best families in Guatemala. He knew absolutely everybody, and he and I would sit down and talk for hours, and he would give me all the hot poop about everybody.

Q: This points out an interesting thing... Particularly in that period, we were able to get extremely well-placed and talented people in our local staffs all over the world, and we gained by this.

RIVES: Yes. The telephone operators and some other jobs were held by perfectly gorgeous Guatemalan young ladies from the best families, because it was the only place their families would allow them to work. So if I would want to see the Foreign Minister, I would call up and get nowhere. Then I would go down to see one of them and say, “How about it?” So they would call up and say, “Mingo (who was the Foreign Minister), Mr. Rives wants to see you.” So I would go. It was very nice.

Q: Did you find after Peurifoy had led that very well-publicized ouster of President Arbenz, which is still called up from time to time, about American interference (that was when?)...

RIVES: Just before I left [Laos]. It must have been 1954, I guess.

Q: Just shortly before you arrived, then.

RIVES: Yes.

Q: Was that rankling? How did the Guatemalan people feel about that?

RIVES: I don't remember it ever being discussed by anybody while I was there. Of course, Ambassador Armour came in and filled a gap. He was so good. I'm sure he soothed everybody's feelings down there. And, as I say, Castillo Armas was doing a fairly good job.

Q: I don't know Central America, but one has the feeling that there are there are some families that run things and really sit on the ...

RIVES: It's still like that, I think, in Guatemala today. It's largely the Spanish descendants and the Mestizos, those of mixed blood. In those days, I must say, I wasn't aware of it as much as we've become aware of it now. The Indians were really very downtrodden. It was for two reasons: One, they were looked down on, and I think still are; two, they wouldn't come out of the mountains where they live. For instance, our banana people, United Fruit, kept trying to hire them, give them work and get them on the plantations, but apparently most of them got terrible tuberculosis and [other diseases] the moment they got out of those mountains and went down to the jungle areas.

Q: What was your impression of the society there in Guatemala?

RIVES: Well, it was very stratified. There were the rich people at the top; half way down you had the people of mixed blood; and at the bottom you had the Indians.

Q: What was American policy?

RIVES: We were trying largely to get them to become a little more democratic. I know the Ambassador used to have long talks with Castillo on this. And we had a lot of Congressional visitors down there from time to time talking to the people. The only problems we ever had with Americans were with United Fruit, who controlled the railroads, and things got so bad at one time that the Ambassador ordered the head of United Fruit to come down from Boston. After that things changed a little bit, but not that much.

Q: What was the problem with United Fruit?

RIVES: They just ran things. They had the biggest plantations; they owned the railroad: that rankled, obviously, for the Guatemalans felt they wanted to own their own country.

Q: Did you find that United Fruit gave the Embassy a rough time, too?

RIVES: No. From what I could see, United Fruit had improved a great deal, plus after Arbenz they had lost probably millions of acres that had been taken from them. Of course, the Guatemalan Government hadn't done anything with it, really. The thing the Guatemalans had such difficulty understanding was what a company like United Fruit can do for them if both sides work right. Their plantations were perfectly beautiful. I went down and visited them. But they were run in a semi-colonial way. You know, there were compounds where all the Americans lived, with commissaries, swimming pools... And then on the side were the peasants, so to speak. But they had been raising wages under pressure from the Embassy, and things like that, so things were better.

Q: As the provincial coup officer, were there any attempts...?

RIVES: Not while we were there, no. But shortly after I left, Castillo Armas was assassinated.

Q: You left there in '57 and went to Paris, at last. You were in Paris from '57 to... ?

RIVES: '61.

Q: When you first went to Paris, what were you up to?

RIVES: For four years I was the Ambassador's aide.

Q: Four years! Good heavens! Who was the ambassador when you first arrived?

RIVES: It was Amory Houghton.

Q: For the whole time?

RIVES: Yes. Ambassador Yost, who was the DCM, put my name out to be the Ambassador's aide, because he knew I spoke French. So I went to Washington and met the Ambassador. I got there just before him. And he gave me what I considered the “two-martini test.” He enjoyed his martinis. He always had two before lunch. I barely got to lunch!

Q: Could you describe France in this period?

RIVES: When we got there we were still recovering from the Suez [Crisis]. The French did not...

Q: Which was October of '56.

RIVES: Yes. They did not appreciate what we had done in Suez. The first year I was there, de Gaulle took over. [Before] '58, it was one Prime Minister after another... it was absolutely incredible. The Ambassador said to me once, “I can't remember who's Prime Minister today!” But it was interesting. Very mouvemente, changes of government, a lot of upset. Of course, there was the Tunisian Crisis with the Americans, and Algiers was getting worse and worse...

Q: How did the Ambassador operate?

RIVES: I thought he did a good job, but he was criticized by a lot of people. He had no tongue — he had lost his tongue to cancer — so he had difficulty; he spoke with a lisp. He was very self-conscious about that. (You could understand him all right.) And, of course, he didn't speak French fluently. He had been studying it, he'd known it years before, but because of the lisp, his accent wasn't good at all. He would not use it officially, so I went with him everywhere.

The thing that he was criticized for was that he only went to see de Gaulle when he had something to discuss, or when de Gaulle summoned him. For that reason, I think, he made a very good impression on de Gaulle. I think he was the only Ambassador who has ever gotten the Grande Cross of the Legion of Honor, when he retired. A lot of Ambassadors there would try to call every week, which is what we used to do in Indochina. If you did that to de Gaulle, you never saw de Gaulle again.

The Ambassador also believed that he was the Ambassador. Ambassador Yost, the DCM, of course, was very important, because of his knowledge of foreign affairs and the French. And so he used to listen to him very closely for a long time. It was only after about a year that he was confident enough to make his own decisions.

He believed that he was the Ambassador. He didn't like Secretary Dulles at all at first, although they became very good friends. At one point... You may recall, Secretary Dulles used to like to send “special ambassadors” right and left. Every time anything happened, he would send a special ambassador. That happened once too often in Paris, and the Ambassador said, “Mike, get me Mr. Dulles on the phone.” He got Mr. Dulles on the phone and (he told me, “Stay where you are.”) he said to him, “I was sent here to be Ambassador, and I'm doing my best. If you don't like what I'm doing, please replace me. There will be no hard feelings. But there will be no more special ambassadors. If I'm Ambassador, I'm Ambassador.” So that was the end of that.

He was also a good golfing partner of President Eisenhower.

Q: I was going to ask about that. Would he call the Eisenhower connection in?

RIVES: I don't think he ever used it.

Q: But it was known?

RIVES: Oh, I think it was implicit in that telephone conversation. But, as I say, they became very good friends and he got to admire Dulles tremendously.

Q: At that time there was a situation in Paris where you had the Marshall Plan Ambassador and a couple of other Ambassadors... the NATO Ambassador... How did he deal with that?

RIVES: He got along with them very well. He was very easy-going. He didn't like to cause problems. He and the NATO Ambassador at that time were very good friends, anyway. They had known each other in the past. But the NATO Ambassador's wife was extremely ambitious, self-conscious of her position, and there were a few ruffled feathers, occasionally, when she would announce herself as the “wife of the American Ambassador.” That didn't go over well with Mrs. Houghton at all. So we had a few ruffled feathers once in a while, but other than that...

Q: As Staff Aide, you must have been with the Ambassador almost all the time, weren't you?

RIVES: Yes. Every ambassador uses his staff aide in a different way. I was with him at all times, but he would almost never ask me to do any work for him. He would call in a political officer, or someone like that, even for speeches, although I was perfectly willing to prepare for him the boiler plate, that kind of stuff. But I took care of him, and when we traveled, I took care of all the finances and that sort of thing. These very rich men, sort of

like Harriman, didn't believe very much in carrying money around with them, so I would have to pay for everything, and he would reimburse me when we came back.

Q: How did the Ambassador deal with the rest of his staff, the political and economic counselors, and the others?

RIVES: He was very good. As I say, he felt very strongly about that, and having been head of Corning Glass in the early days, when he had known every person in [the organization], the first thing he did when he came to Paris, was to visit every section of the Embassy, from the garages to the roof, and every outlying building (of course, we had I don't know how many buildings in Paris). The French were very impressed by that. I used to ride up in the elevator and people would say, “C'est la premiere fois. Je n'ai jamais vu un ambassadeur...” They were terribly impressed and pleased.

Within the Embassy itself, his door was pretty much open. He had a small staff meeting every day; he had a large staff meeting once a week, but most of the important officers could walk in any time. But they had to walk in through my office, and I controlled that.

Q: Did the Ambassador ever tell you, don't let so and so in?

RIVES: No, he never said that.

Q: This was before Algeria...

RIVES: It was during Algeria. Our first crisis was what was called the Tunisian Crisis. Some Americans were shipping in arms through Tunisia. That was when Dulles sent one of his special envoys over, but that one was all right, for it was Ambassador Robert Murphy, whom the Ambassador got to admire very much and hired afterwards. He was put in charge of Corning Glass International.

We went from that to Algiers, and things got more and more hectic in town. On a regular basis there would be demonstrations and parades down the Champs-Elys#es, which

would then swing towards the National Assembly across the Seine, but the French would always have police there to stop them. I would stand in my window next to the Ambassador's office, and as the crowd stopped, every time there was the same thing. There would be a cry of “l'Ambassade Americaine!” And the crowd would just turn around and shoot for the American Embassy, at which point the special police, the CRS, would come out from under the trees where they were hiding, and they would form in front of our Embassy and stop them.

Q: What were they after with us?

RIVES: Just reaction, you know.

Q: What were we doing?

RIVES: We weren't doing anything at that point, just sitting on the sidelines, encouraging them to reach some kind of agreement, but that was about it.

Q: What was the feeling in the Embassy... Paris has struck me, during the de Gaulle period, in other interviews I've done, as at least at other times, a very divided Embassy, under de Gaulle, particularly. Some felt, this is what France needs; others felt he was really taking France down the wrong course. How did you find it at the time you were there under de Gaulle?

RIVES: Well, before de Gaulle took over, the Ambassador went to call on him. After we left de Gaulle that first visit, the Ambassador said, “I will never talk to that man again, he was so rude!” And he really was. It was incredible. Ambassador Yost said to him, “Don't say that, because you're going to be talking to him one of these days.” And, of course, he was.

Once de Gaulle became President, he was still de Gaulle, but he was a very impressive person. Obviously, his tone changed... I was very fortunate, because until the very end, I

was always the interpreter whenever the Ambassador met with de Gaulle. (Although I am not an interpreter...I can translate, but I am not an interpreter as such.)

I would say that when I was there, the Embassy was almost entirely in favor of de Gaulle.

Q: Well, it had seen what had happened before.

RIVES: Yes. I won't say we missed the boat, but twice just before de Gaulle took over, [we were forewarned]. I went to a big dinner one night, organized by the Station Chief. At that dinner was a General Petit, a huge French General, very handsome, who commanded in Morocco later on. During the course of that dinner (there were ladies present, and servants), he virtually told us that there was going to be a change in government.

So the next day, we all got together in the Ambassador's office, and we reported this. There were the Station Chief, the Political Section Chief, and myself, I guess, who had been at the dinner. We sent a telegram to Washington saying we'd been told de Gaulle is going to take over, but just cannot believe that a General of the French Army at a dinner would give us that kind of [information].

There was no reaction, so two days later, I was called by this General and asked to meet with him. He wouldn't meet with me in the Embassy or publicly, so I invited him to lunch in my apartment, and he told me the same thing all over again. So we sent another telegram. The Ambassador ended it the same way again. He said, “Take this for what it's worth, we can't believe...” It would be like General Marshall saying he was going to overthrow Roosevelt. But that's what happened. I guess they were tipping us off, alerting us.

Q: How did the Embassy react to the takeover of de Gaulle?

RIVES: On the whole we were all pleased. Things were getting so bad it was almost civil war. I think it was partly thanks to President Coty, of course, who made the public gesture and asked him to take over.

Q: What about our relations with the French group that's so important there but in other countries might not be, the intelligentsia? I've always had the feeling there's a certain amount of disdain for the Americans, if not outright hostility.

RIVES: I think that depends on the people at the post there. We had a very good group there, I must say, and the Ambassador and Mrs. Houghton played a tremendous social role. They entertained tremendously, and they were very popular. When you did it in that way, it played into the hands of the intelligentsia, if you want to put it that way.

One thing the Ambassador would never do, and we could never change him, he would not discuss business at a dinner or at a luncheon. The Foreign Service rule for giving luncheons is so you can discuss business, but the Ambassador just would not do it. When we were having cigars after dinner, then he would discuss business. But he would never sit around the table...never. Never. We beat him on the head for that, but he wouldn't do it. Cecil Lyon, who became Minister-Counselor after Charles Yost left, used to do most of the business at luncheons.

Q: How did Ambassador Houghton deal with Cecil Lyon?

RIVES: Oh, very well, they were very good friends. He was a great admirer of Ambassador Yost, and he was very fond of Cecil Lyon. And Randy Kidder was his Political Counselor.

Q: You had a very strong Embassy.

RIVES: Very good. And we had John Emerson there, who was removed, unfortunately, unfairly.

Q: He was hit by the McCarthy times.

RIVES: Yes. He ended up as Consul General in Nigeria. The Ambassador offered to keep him in Paris, but Emerson said it wasn't worth the effort.

Q: Not only this time, but earlier on, could you talk about the McCarthy era, how you saw it at the time.

RIVES: I went through it, and I was not amused by it. It started when I was in Bonn, and in Indochina. Some of the people I admired most — Sam Reber, who was Number Two in Bonn when I was there, he suffered for it, and, of course, there was Charlie Thayer, whose career was ruined, and the officer who went to Peru for years, he was in Bonn when I was there. Then, when I came back from Indochina, I was called in and accused of being a homosexual. I am told that every bachelor went through this.

Q: This was the standard procedure: if you weren't married, obviously you were a homosexual.

RIVES: Yes, I went through that... I was so mad, I got a lawyer, my father got me a very good lawyer, and the lawyer said to me, “Tell them to put up or shut up.” So I did that, and they were so mad. I was alone in the room, and the security man had a witness — there were two of them and myself — and they tried the usual thing. I've realized since then that it's the way police do things, you know. They had a file, and they said, “Oh, we've got all this stuff on you!” (which was a lot of nonsense), and I told them to put up or shut up. Then I wrote a letter to the Inspector General of the Foreign Service in which I expressed my outrage and told him that I thought the methods they used were Gestapo methods, and I wouldn't stand for it. And so I was delayed in my assignment to Guatemala for five months while they investigated the investigators.

Q: Which must have put you on somebody's list.

RIVES: Well, anyways, then I was cleared and went to Guatemala. But I was not amused by that.

Q: It was a horrible period, this, and Scott McLeod, I think, was McCarthy's boy. In all this, did you have the feeling that the Foreign Service was worth it and you would persevere...

RIVES: Well, I was enjoying myself. I liked the Foreign Service. Maybe I was naive, but I think most of us who entered it in those days entered it with the feeling we were going to do something for our country, maybe, or try... It wasn't until about '75 that I felt that the atmosphere in the State Department had completely changed.

Q: I came into the Foreign Service in '55, and this was after most of the McCarthy stuff, but particularly Secretary Dulles, we very definitely had that idea that if you came in, that you couldn't really depend on the Secretary of State to stand behind you if you got into trouble.

RIVES: That was true of almost every Secretary of State, I'm sorry to say. But it was particularly true of him, yes. But I don't think you let that kind of thing...

Q: We had a period of both Marshall and Acheson. That was before, and that set a standard that was never reached thereafter.

Well, in France, the opposition to de Gaulle, did the Ambassador make an effort to see people who were on other sides?

RIVES: Oh, yes. Yes. Particularly the other officers did. They had no political sanctions.

Q: What was the view of the Communist Party of France, Maurice Lareze, and all that, at that time?

RIVES: I don't know that we had, and I'm sure that the Ambassador had no dealings with them, probably because they didn't want to deal with us. But the political officers did. I think the Embassy generally felt that the communist vote was more a negative vote of displeasure than a vote for the communists most of the time, because when the crunch came on important questions, de Gaulle always got majorities.

Q: You stayed as the Ambassador's aide the whole time. I would think in a way, career-wise, people would be saying you had better not do this too long.

RIVES: Well, originally, we agreed that I would leave after two years. And then when the two years were up, I forget, there was something going on, the President was coming on a State visit or something, he kept saying, “Do you mind holding on for another ...?” And I kept holding on, holding on, holding on...

Q: You left there in '61. This was, obviously, a new Administration, the Kennedy Administration, and your Ambassador had gone. What did you do then?

RIVES: I was an “African expert” by then...

Q: How did you become that?

RIVES: Because the Ambassador took a trip just after the referendum on West Africa and before they actually got their independence. Bill Whitman, who was the officer in charge of African Affairs in the Embassy, persuaded the Ambassador that this was going to be the last opportunity any of us would have to go to [French] Africa while it was still French. So we got the air attach# cranked up and we took a trip through all of West Africa, except one or two countries, for three weeks. We visited places that nobody else had been, so when we came back, Whitman wrote an absolutely brilliant paper on Africa... and when I transferred to Washington, I found myself an “African expert.”

Q: Did you get any feeling for French Africa, because some other interviews I had with people who went out there in the early '60s, were saying that there was still a residual, almost colonial outlook by our Consuls General who were in Dakar and some of the other places...

RIVES: Well, there was. Of course, it was still French when I went there...

Q: But, sort of a feeling that the Africans will never take over...

RIVES: I think amongst us there, yes and no. You had people like Don Dumont, who was not that way. Some of the others probably were. Of course, we only had about three, I think. As I say, Whitman wrote this brilliant paper about Africa, which served as the basis for African policy for years.

Q: When you came back, you had a full plate of African countries, didn't you?

RIVES: Well, I was the Director for the four Central African countries.

Q: This included what countries?

RIVES: French Congo, Central Africa Republic, Cameroon, and Gabon.

Q: The Kennedy Administration came in fascinated with Africa. You're the desk officer at this time... Soapy Williams is in... it's really a most exciting time for Africa. What was your impression of (1) our knowledge of Africa, and (2) how the Administration was seeing Africa against, what you were supposed to provide, the political realities.

RIVES: Well, I think we were all naive about Africa. As I look back, more than when I was there, I guess, I think we all felt Africa was a newly independent country. [The colonies] had all been given constitutions based either on the French, British, or American constitutions...

Maybe one of the most important aspects of the policy was fear of the communists taking over. And so, in a lot of ways, it was a question of who got in fastest with the most money, I think. Whether Soapy Williams entirely went along with that, or not, I don't know. I don't think he worried so much about the communists; he just wanted to help the Africans. And I must say, his policy in those days was not that exciting; I thought it was sort of naive. But if you go to the retirees' days in the State Department... I haven't been now for about four

years, but the last time I went there, I went to a seminar on Africa, and it could have been Soapy Williams speaking. The problems were exactly the same. And the solutions offered were exactly the same. Only now, I think we're cutting back on the number of posts, and things like that. Congress in those days, of course, was much more receptive to economic assistance, so we poured money in various places.

The first thing President Kennedy did was to give every Chief of State a limousine, and every country either a mobile film unit or a mobile medical unit. And I must say, to me, it was fascinating in those days, because I had always believed in American know-how, and with every unit we sent a mechanic with a three-year supply of parts. Within six months we were getting frantic telegrams from those mechanics, saying, “Send us more parts. And please tell Ford, Chrysler, Jeep, and everybody else that they've got to have better springs.” So we passed that word around, and the reply that came back from every one of the companies was the same: “Couldn't care less. We've got our market in America. Who cares about Africa?” That was the beginning of the end of American cars over there.

Q: The area you dealt with, did you find there was much in the way of files or knowledge about the area?

RIVES: Almost none. There was a little bit, you know, because we had a Consulate in Brazzaville.

Q: Were you there during the famous trip, or had it happened already, was it Williams who took a swing through all the African countries?

RIVES: Oh, I went with him on that one.

Q: Can you talk about that?

Q: Well, we had a special plane. In fact, I think it was Eisenhower's former plane, because it actually had bunks in it, whatever it was called. We visited all these countries... It was

somewhat the trip I had taken with Ambassador Houghton, except we went to the Belgian Congo, which we hadn't in the earlier days. It was to show the flag, I think, and we had an Assistant Secretary of HEW with us, amongst other things. I always remember him, because in the Congo, when Soapy offered grandly, "What can we do to help you? Would you like some doctors?" And when we got on the plane again, this Assistant Secretary of HEW said, "For Heaven's sakes, don't ever let me hear you say anything like that again! If it wasn't for all the foreign doctors who work at the hospitals in the United States, we wouldn't be able to keep our hospitals going. Don't offer any."We went to a place in the middle of the Belgian Congo — this was after the fighting had stopped, more or less — I can't remember which town it was, but I had never seen anything like it. It was completely empty. There wasn't a soul in it. Every building was empty. But the Congolese Government brought people in, and there were a few Belgian planters still hanging around by the skin of their teeth in the outskirts, and they gave us this feast which must have been flown in by special plane from Brussels. It was a huge meal, and the perspiration was pouring down our faces, no air conditioning, of course. Suddenly, "White Christmas" was played by a military band which marched outside the windows!

Q: When you got back and you were in charge of this Central African office, what was your analysis that you were passing on about American interests in the area?

RIVES: American relations in the area were very limited. In Central African republics, we did have interests: diamond people. Jackie Kennedy's boyfriend, Mr. Tempelsman, was always putting pressure for help there. And in Gabon, U.S. Steel and Bethlehem Steel were interested, at one point, in developing huge iron ore deposits inland, but it meant building railroads and things like that; I don't think it's ever gotten off the ground. In the Congo, we had no interests at all, really. After a while, of course — all the road-making equipment used to be American — the French developed their own, and they started closing the market on us. The French were really very colonial. They still are, because they support local currencies so they can exert pressure, things like that.

Q: Did you have any feeling, in the area you were doing, about Soviet penetration at that time?

RIVES: I was very interested by that, because I think we had misunderstood it for a long while. As I said in the beginning, we had visions, fear of the Soviets taking over Africa. And a lot of the governments that took over, after a while, when all these constitutions were overthrown, each country followed much the same pattern. It was very much a Soviet pattern. Guinea was the first one to do it. What they were interested in, what they used the Soviet pattern for [was this]: If you were the Soviet communist regime, then you could go to the government and say, “Look, this is the way you do it: you organize cells, you spread out the power from the center, and in five years you will have such and such in place, in ten years you will have such and such in place.”

They'd come to us and say, “How do we establish democracy?” “What does it mean?” “Can you explain?” It's hard to explain. You grow up in it. It just develops. You have to have education, that kind of thing. They couldn't find anything for us to give them concrete to hang on to. So they'd all go that way. What finally evolved, and I finally realized this when I was stationed in Burundi, the communists realized the same thing. They would use the Soviet system up to a certain level, and then they'd throw it aside, and either swing somewhat towards our way, or just be themselves. And that's what happened. The Soviets cut back on their aid; we cut back on our aid at about the same time.

Q: How did Assistant Secretary Williams use the desk? How did he operate within the Bureau?

RIVES: I'm not sure that he used it any more than any other Secretary, or any less. We wrote papers and think pieces, you know, that kind of thing, put forward suggestions. But he set the overall tone at the top, which we followed. When all these new African embassies were established, we all had to work with him like mad to find places to live, where they wouldn't be spat upon by the neighbors, and that kind of thing... Soapy, I must

say, was very conscientious, and having a lot of money, he was able to do things a lot of Assistant Secretaries couldn't have.

You know he was a very good square dancer. He was a caller for square dancing, and very good at it, too. So he would insist on having square dances, which was something. At the first one, on the eighth floor, all the Africanists, of course, had to be there. We all arrived there, and when we headed for the bar, there was no liquor. He didn't believe very much in drinking, although he did drink a little bit. So after that one, we all used to tank up before we went to these things! They were sort of drawn out. I must say, the African Ambassadors were not very pleased, either, but we all did the dosido's and things like that! And he held special classes for us in the Department of Commerce Cafeteria for this kind of thing.

And then we went on that famous trip. I think it was in Fort Lamy or Ouagadougou, or someplace like that, they put on native dances, and — this was in the middle of the night, mind you — and suddenly he turned to us all, and we had to get up and do square dancing. I think the people thought we were absolutely insane. Soapy called for us, and, as I say, he was a good caller... You know, he used us as his staff...

Q: You left there after this, in '63, was it?

RIVES: Yes. I went to Brazzaville as DCM.

Q: What did you see in this area — you had been looking at this area now for several years — for future American interests?

RIVES: Very slight.

Q: Was there an Ambassador in Brazzaville?

RIVES: Yes, Barney Koren. He became one of my best friends, although at the time I was assigned there, he didn't want me at all. Ambassadors, you know, can choose their own

DCMs. He had one he wanted, and they wouldn't release him. I think he was at the War College or something like that. So he reluctantly accepted me. The thing, again, that broke the ice was he loved his dry martinis in the evening, so we sat down... and he loved to play golf, which I also played in those days.

I was in Brazzaville for just about a year, and our relations were in terrible shape. The Chinese were there, and the Russians were there, very influential, and we were really frozen out. We couldn't have contacts with anybody, and the Ambassador kept being called back for various reasons, so about half the year I was Charg#. Poor Mrs. Koren stayed there holding the fort while the Ambassador was back [in Washington]. Finally, they put two or three of our officers in jail, including the AID director, and I had a hell of a time getting them out. I guess it was the third time the Ambassador was called back, this time — I must say, he was not a fool — when we went to the airport, he was carrying suitcases and a heavy bag. I said to him, “How 'bout letting me carry something?” He said, “Fine.” And I nearly fell, because he was taking home all the family silver. He said, “I don't think I'm going to be back.”

While he was flying home, I got a telegram from Mr. Rusk saying, “You will close the Embassy in twenty-four hours.” I went back and said, “I cannot close the Embassy in twenty-four hours. You've got to give me three days.”

This was an eye-opener for me, because we thought our files were pretty low, but when we started burning, it really was amusing. Thank God the Congolese were not terribly [knowledgeable], because all night you could see the whole sky was glowing from the heat of our chimney, and the next day the entire area around our Embassy was covered in white ash. The British were going to be our protecting power, and the British Ambassador came up to me and said, “Are you snowing around here? There's snow in Brazzaville!” Anyways, I closed it after three days. In fact, we closed it the day of a national independence holiday, while they were having big ceremonies. As I was driving to the

airport with the British number two (the British Ambassador was at the ceremony), on the radio Micombero, the President, was saying, “We regret the absence of the Americans...”

Q: Let's talk about the year you were there. In the first place, what was the political situation, the economic situation...?

RIVES: The economic situation was rather bad. The French influence was still quite noticeable, not only in economics, but the French military were still training the Congolese. Although they were caught just as flat-footed as we were when there was a coup. Politically, as I say, the Chinese had a large embassy there, and the Russians had a large embassy. They were probably the two most influential embassies there, except for the French, because of the French financial control.

Q: What happened to cause the situation to be so bad that you had to leave. Arresting embassy people is not a good way to maintain relations...

RIVES: Exactly. They were just picking on us, they were just making a thing... Maybe they were encouraged by the Russians and the Chinese, I don't know. But our relations were just dreadful.

Q: Was there was a coup while you were there?

RIVES: I was just trying to think. I think there must have been, because the French, as I said, were caught flat-footed. I guess that's when Micombero took over. Yes! That's right, because Youlou had been President. Then Micombero took over.

Q: Was Youlou there while you were there?

RIVES: I'm trying to remember if he was still there. Of course, he came to Washington. He was the first African Chief of State who came to call. I took care of him while he was in Washington, but I can't remember if he was still there when I was there, or not.

Q: What caused the arrests?

RIVES: Well, I think they just wanted to be unpleasant to the Americans, who weren't giving them much money. And the Chinese and the Russians, I think they were just taking sides. It was a Cold War thing, and they were making their choice.

Q: Since arrests of Embassy personnel are rather unusual, how did this happen?

RIVES: Well, I'll tell you what happened the second time, when the AID mission chief was arrested. He arrived, and he hadn't been able to get his visa renewed. He'd been out of the country, I think. His visa was to expire something like two days after he came back in. In spite of that, they seized it and claimed that he was there illegally, put him in jail. We had an awful time getting visas renewed for anybody in the Embassy, and the thing that saved us was that the UN session came, and they all had to have visas for Washington, and I just sat on them. I said, “You're not going to Washington until you give us our visas.” So we got the visas.

Q: How about the other person who was arrested?

RIVES: I can't remember who else... let's see, the AID man was the main man. Then we had a couple of people coming and visiting us who were put in temporary [confinement] and then expelled without being allowed in the country. They were put in a hotel room. I couldn't even see them. They were just shoved about.

Q: Were we at any point saying, from the Embassy side, “This is ridiculous, let's get out of here.”

RIVES: No, because the Ambassador and I both felt that it would be better to leave somebody. When we closed the Embassy, the Ambassador in Washington and I in Brazzaville both recommended against it. We recommended leaving one person there.

Just as a thorn in their side. Which I thought would be more effective than getting out of there.

Q: Did we sever diplomatic relations?

RIVES: Oh, yes. There was no Embassy there for I think about five years, something like that. And we regretted it, because there was no way for us to keep in touch with what was going on there, except through the British and the French.

Q: Were the British having problems?

RIVES: They finally had to close. Even the French had a terrible time.

Q: To close an Embassy, how does one do it? This happens so seldom.

RIVES: I must say, it was an experience. We followed the book. We have instructions, thank Heavens, for what you do. The first thing was to destroy all the files that we could. Then we turned over to the British Embassy, and we had to make all sorts of arrangements about what happens to the buildings, who takes care of what, what happens to the cars and people's belongings. A lot of the people had to leave right away. I put people on every flight that went out of there, whether they went to South Africa or England or Kenya, or anywhere else. And then we had to pack their things and get them out of there. The British did some of that for us after we left.

Q: Couldn't you get in a canoe and cross over to [Leopoldville]?

RIVES: Relations between the two Congos were not that kind. There was almost no communication. The two Ambassadors to the Congo — Mac Godley was on the one side, and Barney Koren was on my side — each had a telescope on their front lawn, and they could see each other across the river. Every day we'd wave to [show] we were still there!

Q: I see you received a Superior Honor award. Was that for getting everybody out of there?

RIVES: I think that was from Burundi, wasn't it?

Q: Oh, that was later, then. OK, so then where?

RIVES: I was in Washington for about six months, and then I went to Burundi, where everybody had been PNGed. So I was there again as Charg#. And I was also AID director, and USIA. The only man left there was the CIA station chief. The Department was so appalled at having CIA in charge that they shot me over there.

Q: You were in Burundi from when to when?

RIVES: Let me see, now... about '66 to '68.

Q: What was the situation? It was a former Belgian protectorate?

RIVES: Yes, a former Belgian protectorate. Independent. It was still a kingdom.

Q: What had happened to the rest of our people?

RIVES: Don Dumont was the Ambassador. Don was a very conscientious guy. Very nice, very pro-African, very pro-democracy... I think the thing that broke the camel's back there was that (I'm a little vague now on who it was), but there was this person there who had to be gotten out. I think it was somebody from either the Russian or the Chinese Embassy who had defected. Somehow, Don got [the person] out. But he was caught, you know, they knew who had done it, so he was thrown out, the DCM was thrown out, the PAO was thrown out, the AID director was thrown out. I arrived there, and there was a station chief, one AID engineer left from working on the roads, and some secretaries... that was it. So I ran the Embassy for about a year before they started it up again.

Q: What was the Burundian attitude towards this?

RIVES: Rather unfriendly. Well, yes and no. When I first got there it was still a kingdom. The king was Mwame Mwambutsa the Fourth. But he resided in Switzerland with his girlfriend, and I never met him. So the kingdom was run by a prime minister (I can't remember who it was) until the king's son, Entare the Fifth, overthrew his father, thinking he was going to take over. Shortly thereafter, he went to Kinshasa on an official trip and while he was gone, he was overthrown by an army captain (whose name I can't think of right now). During my stay there, we also had the Six-Day War. That was really the worst part of our relations.

Q: The Six-Day War being the '67 war between Israel and the Arabs?

RIVES: And Egypt, particularly. By then, my Embassy had been strengthened again. I did have a junior Political Officer. I had a Public Affairs Officer. When the Six-Day War came, the Egyptians organized an anti-American demonstration. We were warned about this. The Embassy was attacked. The reason I say the Egyptians organized this, we could see the Egyptian Charg#'s car going round and round in circles round the Embassy while all this was going on, directing things. Fortunately we had an Embassy that was all glass but had cement things on the outside, like the Embassy in Delhi, you know...

Q: Oh yes, like a facade...

RIVES: Yes. They couldn't break in the steel doors, but they broke all the glass. Then they walked down the street and attacked the Cultural Office. That they did sack, and they burnt the books. Meanwhile I had called for extra help, but it wasn't forthcoming. So I called the Belgian Ambassador, who was a retired general, and he was sick in bed, poor guy, but anyways I said, “Look, you've got to do something.” Of course, the Belgian officers still commanded the [Burundi] military, so I said, “You've got to help us.” Anyway, by the time they got around, everything was over, and I drove down to the Center. There was smoke

coming out of the Center and burning books were on the sidewalk. The Foreign Minister arrived, and then the Interior Minister arrived. And they expressed condolences. Then the military arrived... And, I must say, I wasn't very diplomatic.So all these people arrived and I gave them a piece of my mind about what I thought had happened. I said, “Your military are only good enough to pick up garbage. [Now they] can do that, and burn the rest of the books.”

The next day I went in and saw the Foreign Minister. By then I'd had people come and make an estimate of the damage, of course, and I gave him my bill... He expressed regret, again, said he hoped I'd get things in order again so that the place would look nice.

I turned round and told Washington what had happened, and I said, “I'm not going to reopen this conference center until I get my money.” Washington came back — I must say, sometimes I think we're too gentle... big countries don't do that, we rise above that — and said, “You'll never get your money back, you'd better open the center. I said, “I won't do it.”

So I sat there for months with this eyesore. The Government kept calling me and saying, “When are you going to fix it up?” I said, “When you give me my money.” So then the Foreign Minister asked me to come in one day and said he was going to Europe and America on a fund-raising trip, to get some money to help Burundi. He said, “What do you think I'll get in Washington?” I said, “You're not going to get anything. I won't even give you a visa.” He said, “Well, What do you need?” To which I replied, “I want my money!”

The next day I got a phone call, and I sent a clerk over, and we had two suitcases of cash. So I gave him a visa, and I sent a telegram to Washington saying, “Money received. Visas issued. They're coming to get financial aid. Don't give them a penny.” And they didn't get anything.

Q: Did we have any interests in Burundi?

RIVES: No. It was just one of those countries where we put some money in, built some roads, which we shouldn't have done... Well, we had one slight interest, Folgers Coffee. We used to buy 90 percent of the crop. It was very high-quality coffee. Mountain coffee, you know the folks... I don't know if they're still doing it now.

Q: What about the Hutu and Tutsi?

RIVES: When I was there, fortunately, they were quiet. The Tutsis were in charge, and still are... the officer class, royalty, you see. There were none of the horrors that happened after I left.

Q: Did you see this an endemic fora?

RIVES: Oh, yes, it was waiting to happen all the time.

Q: Were the Hutus really kept down?

RIVES: Yes, pretty well. The thing that kept things going, don't you see, were the Belgians. As long as they were in charge, no nonsense.

Q: What about your contact with the Burundi Government?

RIVES: It was always proper, official. As far as social things go, there wasn't too much. They would come to dinners, but like in so many of those countries — I don't know if you've ever served in countries like this— you never knew who was coming to dinner. It was almost impossible to have a sit-down dinner, because you might have ten acceptances and two would come, or maybe twenty would come. It was always nerve-racking for a bachelor, I can tell you that. But we did have some [contact]. They didn't invite you to their houses very often.

Q: You just mentioned the fact that you were a bachelor. It must have made you a pretty movable person. You went to a number of rather difficult places. Do you think this was...

RIVES: Oh I think it was a factor, yes. Firstly I was a bachelor, and secondly, I spoke French. Of course, a number of these places were French-speaking.

Q: They put you on the short list!

RIVES: And you pay for that, too, I noticed. When I went to Burundi, there wasn't enough silverware, so I had to bring my own. I asked for more silverware from the State Department... never got it. When George Renchard replaced me as Ambassador, he immediately was given two full sets of extra silver... Mrs. Renchard, did, let's put it that way...

Q: Did we see in Burundi at that time the "Soviet Menace" or anything like that?

RIVES: The Soviets were very much there. I don't think the Chinese were there at all, if I remember... I don't think so. But as I remarked earlier, that's where I saw the real change in both the Soviet and the American attitudes toward Africa. We cut our aid back to nothing at one point, except the Ambassador's twenty-five thousand dollar emergency fund. And the Russians also cut way back.

Q: Was this a mutual assessment that this wasn't going anywhere?

RIVES: I think we and the Russians reached the same conclusion at the same time, is all I can figure out, because it was really quite startling.

Burundi was very much against us on the Six-Day War. They would never admit they were wrong, even when the Egyptians said that...

Q: Why were they taking sides in the Six-Day War?

RIVES: Because it was part of Africa. The Egyptians said, “You're our brothers... All Africans together...” You know, that kind of stuff.

Q: The Egyptians were basically part of the slave-trading class.

RIVES: Not in Burundi. Burundi never had slavery. None of the slave routes went through Burundi. They all had to go around it. They couldn't get through there. The Tutsi warriors wouldn't let them. No, they were never part of the slave trade.

Q: They already had their own indigenous system that worked! Well, why don't we stop at this point, and when we get together on Thursday, we'll pick up with your involvement with Laos and Cambodia, after you left Bujumbura. Thank you very much.

(Interview continued on July 27)

Q: When you left Bujumbura in 1968, where did you go?

RIVES: I went to Washington and entered the Senior Seminar for a year, which was one of the best years of my life.

Q: Oh, yes, that was fun. I took it, too, some years later. What did you get out of the senior seminar?

RIVES: I must admit that as I went to it, I was not quite sure what it was going to do for me, but what it turned out to be was really a re-Americanization year. We had a wonderful director, Ambassador Lewis Jones. He took us all over the United States, from the Virgin Islands to Seattle, from Texas to Chicago. It was the year of the Chicago riots. (We went immediately after the riots.)

Being a small group, we saw all sorts of people, business people and others. There were two things I thought were fascinating about that year: First, I got to see my own country for the first time in my life, really see it. The second was an eye-opener to me... [of all] the

people we met, especially the business people, that whole year, there was one man who was outstanding, and the rest, I thought, were fairly second rate. Having always believed in the spirit of American business [this came as a surprise.]

The man I thought was really outstanding was Walter Wriston, the head of City Bank. Most of the others, especially Ling of Ling, Temco Vought of Texas, were perfect horrors.

It was really a fascinating year. Then at the end of the year, for Lewis Jones' conclusion to our course, we had to write the paper. It was frankly wonderful, and better than it is today, because I'm told that today at the end of the senior seminar, everybody has to write a serious paper. Lewis Jones said to us, “You're not going to write anything about anything you've ever known or done before. If you write a serious paper for the State Department, nobody will read it. You're not going to write a policy paper in three weeks that's going to change things.” So we all had to do something about which we knew nothing. One of my classmates wrote on the sex life of the shrimp. I wrote on the used U.S. aircraft business. They were really very good [papers]. [Lewis'] attitude was, that if you can write a decent paper on something you know nothing about, that really proves something.

Q: That's excellent. Then, in '69 you were up for grabs, is that right?

RIVES: Yes, there was no assignment for me, so I took my vacation, went home, and I was sitting on the beach when I got a frantic call from Washington. It was Tom Corcoran, who was then the Laos-Cambodian desk officer, Country Director, and he asked me if I would be interested in being Charg#, reopening the Embassy in Phnom Penh. The Department was not very enthusiastic about this idea... it was Tom's suggestion. They wanted somebody more junior than I was. But he persuaded them, and I came down to Washington, and it was agreed that I would reopen the Embassy in Phnom Penh.

Q: Can you give me some details about why the Embassy was shut down and what the situation was when you got out there?

RIVES: Well, the Embassy had shut down, as I remember, the reason Sihanouk gave, was the interference by CIA. I think he was just fed up with America. He'd been infuriated, particularly by Rob McClintock when he was DCM in Saigon before he became Ambassador to Cambodia, who invented the name “Snooky.” It gets back to people, you know. Sihanouk never forgave that.

Q: I just might point out, as a diplomatic representative, it's never a good idea to make disparaging remarks about a chief of state, because it gets back to you.

RIVES: Well, I don't mean to criticize McClintock, necessarily, because I admired him. He was a brilliant ambassador.

Q: He was a brilliant ambassador, but this was not...

RIVES: But he did foolish things like that... Anyway, for various reasons they were closed down. I think they had been closed down five years when I went there. Actually, the last Ambassador who was supposed to go there and didn't make it, was Randy Kidder. He got there, but they would never accept his credentials. So he had to leave. He retired.

Anyways, when I was called in and asked to go out there, there were two people who were very interested. One was, of course, Marshall Green, the Assistant Secretary, and the other was Senator Mike Mansfield. Before I went to Cambodia, I was sent to see Senator Mansfield. It was understood by Sihanouk, and Senator Mike Mansfield insisted, that there would be an Embassy opened at the Charg# level, and that there would be no CIA. If there was the CIA, the Embassy would be closed.

Q: Really! This was Marshall Green and Mansfield?

RIVES: It was Senator Mansfield, I think, who made the condition, the agreement with Sihanouk, that there would be no CIA.

Q: He had talked to Sihanouk, then?

RIVES: Apparently. And also that my general job would be to reestablish relations, and after it had built up, when things got better, we'd send an ambassador. So I went out there, and Elden Erickson had been out there already. He was waiting for me. He'd been out looking for buildings, that kind of administrative thing. So I moved into the local hotel at that time, and opened our Embassy there in one of the cottages. I had been there about two or three weeks or something when Senator Mansfield came on a visit. Meanwhile, I had called on the Foreign Minister, of course.

Prince Sihanouk gave a luncheon for myself and Senator Mansfield, just the three of us. We had a very pleasant lunch, and at the end, Senator Mansfield was really very kind. He got up and gave a little speech and told Sihanouk that he was hoping for better relations. He pointed out the fact that Sihanouk and I were of almost an identical age, and that he'd known me for years, and etcetera like that, and he hoped we'd get to be good friends. So that was a wonderful introduction to Sihanouk...

From then on, things were pretty normal. You know, I had established some contacts and did my political reporting. I was completely alone there for a while, except for a secretary and then I finally acquired a little staff. We found a building on the riverfront and moved in. We used the servants quarters in the back for office space. We had no furniture, although we were told we were going to get some. The press became interested. Once in a while they'd come visit.

But the thing that really got things going as far as the Cambodian situation went, was the secret bombing of Cambodia, of which I was completely unaware. At night Phnom Penh used to shake, literally. You could hear it. But I assumed it was on the border. And then one day one of our air attacks destroyed a Cambodian outpost up north, and that really did cause quite a furor. It was all publicized, so it was known.

That evening, Sihanouk was giving a large party at his house. When you went to one of Sihanouk's parties, you were prepared to spend the night, because he not only had a good party, but he would join the orchestra. He was a very good musician, played three or four instruments, and of course, nobody could leave until he gave the signal. So as long as he was happy playing, we all had to stay there.

That evening I went there prepared for the worst. The Chinese were there, and the Russians were there, and the French were there, and everybody else. They were all looking to see what his reaction would be to me. At first, I wondered whether I should go, but I thought, “What the heck, I'd better go.” So I went, and this was typical of Sihanouk: he played it straight. He met me, and everything was wise and well, and I danced with Princess Monique, you know, and all that kind of stuff. All to the disappointment of all the other foreign guests. I think they expected him to snub me, you know, raise hell because of what had happened — which he'd done already, privately. Afterwards, the press became more interested, there were more and more press people. And then, of course, there was the famous incursion into Cambodia.

But before that happened, we used to go... (I just want to make one point clear here: Sihanouk was an interesting person, and I think we'd misunderstood him for many years. It was just about the time I went to Cambodia that I think the Department and the Government as a whole began to understand what Sihanouk really was. He was a patriot. What he did was for Cambodia, not for himself, and there were no real ulterior motives except for that.) When I was there, we used to go out in the country to open a rice mill or new plantation or something like that, from time to time. It became really rather a joke between me and the French Ambassador and the British to see who would be insulted that day, because we all took our turns. Every time he had an opportunity... He'd attack the United States one day, and then the next day he'd attack the Russians, and then he'd attack the French, and then he'd attack the Chinese, and then he'd let the British have it.

So we all took our turn. We all braced each day when we went in to see who got criticized. But it was that way. It was deliberately done.

Q: How would he insult you?

RIVES: He'd attack us, and he'd criticize the attitude of the United States for what we were doing in Vietnam, and he'd criticize the French for not helping them enough, and the Russians for being brutes, or something like that.

Q: Would this be in public speeches?

RIVES: Oh, yes!

Q: He wouldn't come up to your face...

RIVES: Oh, not at all! He'd make a public speech during the opening of a rice mill or something. He'd drag in one of us at each occasion. We would all be sitting there waiting, because we were all ordered to be there, you know. We'd all ride in convoys, and we'd sit there in the blazing sun, and then he'd insult us! But it was a balancing act, and he did it very deliberately.

Q: It sound a bit like Sukarno used to do, but only to the United States.

RIVES: Yes. And then, of course, the other thing I was supposed to do, which I never succeeded in doing, was to try to get him to accept our intelligence information about what the Viet Minh and the Viet Cong were doing. I gave that information to him and to the Foreign Minister regularly, but he would never acknowledge it, and he never did anything that showed he was taking action against them. He was not playing the Viet Cong game, but I think he realized he couldn't do anything about it.

Q: We were talking earlier about the North Vietnamese, not the Khmer Rouge. The Viet Cong was pretty much limited to within Vietnam, wasn't it?

RIVES: Well, the Viet Minh trail came through Cambodia.

Q: The Ho Chi Minh Trail?

RIVES: Yes, the Ho Chi Minh Trail came down through Cambodia.

Q: You were there from when to when?

RIVES: I got there in about September of '69, and I was removed in December of '70.

Q: Did you go to see Sihanouk from time to time in person?

RIVES: Oh, yes.

Q: Can you talk about how one dealt with him. What was the Washington attitude toward Sihanouk? Or were there attitudes toward Sihanouk?

RIVES: I didn't have anything to do with this until just before I went to Cambodia, but my impression was that they all saw him as sort of a nuisance, a pest, amusing in some ways, dangerous in other ways, you know... a mixed reaction to him. Very few people, I think, understood him until about the time we reopened our Embassy. Except for somebody like Mansfield, who was always, I think, rather in his favor. And I think that some of our ambassadors appreciated him, what he was doing, but I don't think Washington really understood him.

Q: What about when you were together with him? Would you go see him man on man? And how did he do?

RIVES: Yes. He was always very polite, and we discussed whatever business I had to discuss with him. The only time I think he summoned me was after that bombing.

Q: What did he do?

RIVES: He gave me hell. He said the United States [action] was inexcusable, etcetera, etcetera.

Q: What did you say?

RIVES: There was very little I could say, except that I would find out what the facts were of why we had done this. There was no getting around it.

Q: This was about when?

RIVES: I don't remember exactly when it was.

Q: Were you able to fly to Saigon from time to time to find out what was going on?

RIVES: No, I never went to Saigon in those days.

Q: Why not? Was this two different worlds?

RIVES: It was pretty much two different worlds. I think I'd had visits from a few people in Saigon during the year, but there were completely different policies, and as I say, I was pretty much alone in Cambodia in the beginning there, so if I left, we'd have to close the Embassy, virtually.

Q: In 1969, were visitors coming out from Washington at all?

RIVES: No, not at the beginning.

Q: Did Alexander Haig ever come out?

RIVES: Yes, but that was later, that was after the bombing started... after the Incursion.

Q: I would like to get a little of the chronology. You arrived there in September of '69. The war was going very strongly in Vietnam, and America was beginning to Vietnamize the

thing. But we had the B-52 bomber raids that were going on there, the so-called "Secret War." Of course, it wasn't secret...

RIVES: Well, a lot of people didn't know about it. I was never told about it... this was sort of typical. This is another way in which Sihanouk played his game. He knew what was going on more than I did, and yet he never made an issue of it. Not to me. So I think he was accepting of certain things. A tacit acceptance of what we were doing, hoping we would help him, while criticizing for something when it became as obvious as the destruction of a Cambodian outpost.

Q: Did he or other people go out and visit the outpost?

RIVES: Well, they had photos and all that.

Q: How about the press?

RIVES: They weren't terribly interested until about the time of the Incursion.

Q: When you say you went out and did your normal reporting, what does this mean?

RIVES: Well, about talks with the Foreign Minister and all, meeting with the French, who were very cooperative. They had a general, I can't remember his name now, who was military attach#. The French were still important there, in a way. French was still the official language. And the French still had connections with military there, and the French general had very good contacts, so he was very good, very open about the information he had. And I tried to get to know Cambodians and other people in town. I also made visits a couple of times to rubber plantations way out in the Parrot's Beak... (In fact, I'm going to see the manager of the plantation where I stayed. He's coming to see me in Boston this month.) I traveled around as much as I could. I went to Angkor Wat, actually, and Sihanoukville (the port).

Q: In Sihanoukville, was part of your brief to take a look and see what type of stuff was coming in?

RIVES: We tried to find out, but we couldn't find out anything in those days. We knew what was coming through, and a lot came through the pipeline.

Q: A lot of military equipment was coming into Sihanoukville. Would you see trucks heading off...

RIVES: Not really. At least I didn't. I didn't have enough staff, really, to send them around to look. I didn't have any attach#s or anything at that time. And when we went to Sihanoukville, quite often it was at Sihanouk's invitation. He had a beautiful villa there, and he would summon the diplomatic corps down there, and we'd have a swim and that kind of thing.

Q: What were you getting out of the Department? Here we were, waging a major war; all attention was focused on it; and on one front... you were sitting in the rear of one of our opponent's fronts. You must have been getting lots of stuff from the Pentagon and from everywhere else...

RIVES: No, virtually nothing. No, because I just think they were just waiting for things to settle down. This had all occurred within a fairly short time. Now, while I was there, there were several embarrassing incidents. There was the famous incident of the ship...

Q: The American Eagle. The reason I know the name of the ship... I was the Consul General in Saigon. I remember Admiral Zumwalt and I were trying to figure out what to do about that damn ship! Would you explain what the problem was?

RIVES: You remember these people had seized it.

Q: Two Americans. They weren't really ideological. They were sort of kooks.

RIVES: Yes. I think they were cracks. One of them disappeared completely. We never saw him. The other turned up in Phnom Penh and we turned him over to the authorities, but then he escaped and was never heard from again. I think one, obviously, was killed, and one ended up in California.

But anyways, the ship arrived and I was told there was nothing to hide there, it was all innocence. The Russians were making noises, as were the Chinese, so I invited the diplomatic corps to come down and look at the ship. So I went down to Sihanoukville with an entourage... I think the Russians refused to come, as I remember, or the Chinese... So we went aboard, and the thing was loaded with napalm! It was extremely embarrassing. Having been assured by Washington there was absolutely nothing to worry about.

Q: I know. Admiral Zumwalt was at that time Commander of Naval Forces in Vietnam. I was called to his headquarters to say this was a mutiny. Mutinies are consular problems. I asked the question, "What's on the ship?" They said, "Napalm." I thought, "Oh, God!"

RIVES: Well, Washington never said anything.

Q: Never told you. We knew it!

RIVES: Everybody took pictures, the press were all there, naturally! A great day! I said, "So what? It's not coming here, it's going off to Bangkok." So they finally released it after a good deal of uproar. That was the main excitement then. Then, of course, we had the Incursion.

Q: Did the Incursion come after Sihanouk was deposed?

RIVES: Oh, yes,

Q: Can we talk about how you viewed the stability of Sihanouk? And also talk about the deposition.

RIVES: Sihanouk, you know, was always Number One. And he had these plots against him continuously. There was a very good system set up. What always happened was when somebody went too far, Sihanouk would exile him, usually to Paris. He'd have to stay there for a year or two, and then he could come back. This had happened to Lon Nol before. Of course, there was a group of people who were very much against Sihanouk. One was Lon Nol; one was Prince Sirik Matak, one of his cousins; and others, including the Foreign Minister, whose name I can't think of right now.

Sihanouk went off to Paris — he hadn't been there for quite a few years — to take the cure and so on... As soon as he had gone, Lon Nol and Sirik Matak and the Foreign Minister, a triumvirate, took over the government. They announced that there had been a coup. (A little later, the Assembly voted Sihanouk out, too. They got the Assembly to vote it, all very legal.) And they sent word to Sihanouk that he was out.

Sihanouk sent back an angry telegram telling them heads would roll, he was returning immediately. If he had returned immediately, he would have won. Because, I'll never forget, the night this all happened, I was out to dinner somewhere, and on my way home to the Chancery in my car, they were painting all the streets. The lines on the sidewalks were all being freshly whitewashed, and the flags were all being put up to welcome home the Chief of State. If he had done it, he could have won. But he didn't. He went off to Moscow. And in Moscow he got the word that the Assembly had voted him out. Instead of coming back again, he got mad and he flew on to Peking. That was the end.

Once Sihanouk had been thrown out, the triumvirate called me in. We had a long talk, and they asked for help. I reported this to Washington. The decision was made that we should extend some assistance. But limited assistance. This was the Nixon Doctrine, which was, you remember, “We'll help those who help themselves when they need help.” So this is the way things stood.

Lon Nol used to call me in periodically, and we'd have a good chat. He'd ask for a lot of equipment, warships, B-52s, you know, and all that kind of stuff... and I told him no. At that time, since we were not openly giving them help, we entered into a very convoluted arrangement whereby the Indonesians turned over all their Russian weapons to us, which we then flew in by chartered aircraft to Phnom Penh, and gave Indonesia American equipment. The press, of course, heard about this, and they were lurking in the background. But I was instructed, and I was perfectly honest with them, and I said that I didn't know anything about American arms.

Q: I was in Saigon at the time, and I can recall, they were going around collecting all the captured AK-47s in order to ship them up to Cambodia.

RIVES: That's right. They came in by chartered aircraft, those, and also the weapons from Indonesia. Quite a lot of stuff came in. And about that time I started getting my first attach#. I had a military attach# and an air attach#. Eventually I got Jonathan Ladd, who was a retired Green Beret Colonel, who had been called back just for this special mission. He and I got along beautifully, because we felt the same way about what we should do about Cambodia. Which was to follow the Nixon Doctrine and help the Cambodians just as much as we possibly could. But if they fell, they fell on their own.

Q: I want to make this clear, because it's often maintained that the CIA worked up a plot to get rid of Sihanouk and Lon Nol. When you were there, there were no CIA people.

RIVES: Until after the Incursion. As far as I know, there was no hanky panky...

Q: How did we see the coup?

RIVES: It really surprised everybody. The French, who as I say had good connections, were completely stunned. They agreed with me that if Sihanouk had come back he would have won.

Q: It was seen as part of the natural forces within Cambodia. These were people who had wanted power, too...

RIVES: Oh, yes. They'd been in the wings trying to get hold of power for years.

Q: And Sihanouk gave them an opportunity by being out of town.

RIVES: Yes. This was the first time they'd really been able to pull this off.

Q: Excuse [the digression]. Back to passing the arms on, and your beginning to build up a small staff, which was essentially, what, military liaison?

RIVES: Yes, and CIA, and, of course, USIA came in, too. At this early stage, things were still fairly well under control, as far as I was concerned. There was no equipment. We had no direct communication with Washington. We went through the PTT, which closed down at midnight every night. Washington, of course, was getting more and more alarmed, because they couldn't get the endless telegraphic traffic which they loved. So we finally got to the stage, unfortunately, where the Incursion took place.

Q: The Incursion took place in the Spring of '70.

RIVES: Right.

Q: Which caused campus riots, Kent State, and so on. Before we get to that, what were you getting about the North Vietnamese role in Cambodia at that point?

RIVES: Very little. The North Vietnamese were in Cambodia. They had an Embassy there, too, in Phnom Penh.

Q: Was there a feeling, though, that there were parts of Cambodia that were essentially off-limits even to Cambodians because they had been taken over by [the North Vietnamese]?

RIVES: Oh, yes. The French told me that. It was fairly well known. And when I went to that plantation in the Parrot's Beak, the manager told me, he said, “At night, this is a Vietnamese base. There's nothing I can do about it.” In the daytime his workers went out and did their rubber thing, and we were able to drive around. But at night, we stayed in our compound. What went on outside...

Q: Did you get any feeling from your reporting and contacts with Cambodians about (a) how they felt about the Vietnamese in general, and (b) the North Vietnamese presence there?

RIVES: I think the Cambodians have always hated the Vietnamese. They look down on them because, after all, Vietnam was part of the Cambodian Empire at one time. They disliked them very much. They rather admired the Chinese. But they hated the Vietnamese on the whole. And so when things went bad, after the Incursion, they turned. They destroyed the North Vietnamese Embassy, which was within sight of Sihanouk's palace, and then there were those slaughters of Vietnamese, throwing bodies in the river, and all that kind of thing that went on.

Q: Before the Incursion, what was the role of the Khmer Rouge at that time?

RIVES: You never heard of them very much. They existed; there were a few reports about them, but I don't think they played much of a role inside Cambodia until after they started moving in.

Q: Let's talk about the Incursion. We're talking about the Spring of 1970. Could you explain how you were informed, how you were prepared for what was happening?

RIVES: I was informed after it took place. It wasn't entirely Washington's fault, because I was all one-time pad. I'm sorry, we did have coding machines, but we had no direct communications. When the PTT opened up in the morning, we got our cables, and I was informed what was taking place, and to tell Lon Nol. So I immediately typed up

the message and went to Lon Nol to deliver it. The press were all waiting there with TV cameras. I went in to deliver the message. Of course, Lon Nol himself was not all that pleased to be told ex post facto. But he accepted it, and when I came out, the press were all dying to get the hot poop. So I just showed them the bare facts. There was an incursion...

Q: For someone coming to this years from now, what was the Incursion we keep talking about?

RIVES: President Nixon decided there would be a limited attack into Cambodia, supposedly to capture the Viet Cong headquarters, which was never found and apparently didn't exist, but apparently we thought that it was there. It was a limited incursion, supposed only to last three or five days, something like that, to accomplish the objective and take out... The second objective, of course, was to include the newly trained Vietnamese troops to see how well they did. (They apparently did very well.)

The result of the Incursion was two-fold. One, it failed in its objective of finding and destroying [the Viet Cong] headquarters; but it was very successful as an attack. What it did do was to push the Vietnamese back. Now, the Vietnamese had known this was going to happen a couple of days before, because the French general told me when the Incursion started, “The Americans had better move fast, because the Vietnamese are pulling back from the front towards Phnom Penh, and they're not going to succeed very well unless they do something in a hurry.”I informed Washington about this. Something strange was going on, I knew. The President kept his word. The Incursion lasted, what, three days, I think it was, and then they pulled out. As I say, I hadn't been informed, and nobody was supposed to come towards Phnom Penh, and, of course, the place by then was swarming with reporters, who came to see me. Of course, I was perfectly innocent about the whole thing, and I said, “There are no American troops around here.” At which point, an American helicopter started circling around Phnom Penh with Charlie Whitehouse in it. You know Charlie Whitehouse. He was the Deputy Ambassador in

Saigon. I sent a perfectly furious telegram to Washington about people flying over Phnom Penh while I was telling the press there were no [Americans] there.

Anyways, that settled down, and then the Cambodians turned on the Vietnamese. There were quite a few slaughters, I think, here and there, and bodies floating down the river. At this point the press was really very anti-Cambodian. And anti-me. They criticized our government for allowing the Cambodians to do these horrible things to the Vietnamese, and why wasn't I doing anything about it. When I tried to explain to them, one of my favorite reporters, a very good one, Henry Kamm of the New York Times, who had been out there for years and was very able, kept attacking me. I would ask him, “Henry, what started all this?” If the Vietnamese hadn't been in Cambodia, hadn't started this, nothing would have happened.” Well, they wouldn't admit that.

This went on like this for months until one day, the New York... no, it wasn't the New York Times... the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, and a couple of other papers' [reporters] came in and asked me why I wasn't doing more to help the Cambodians. I explained there was just so much we could do, and we believed in the Nixon Doctrine and all that. At that time it was very amusing, because now they wanted me to say something publicly. I said, “Well, you're the ones who have built up all this anti-Cambodian feeling. Why don't you change it?” They said, “Our headquarters censor what we write, and they've taken a certain attitude, and it's up to them to change it.” I said, “Well, that's your worry.” So that was the press attitude.

Q: Also, wasn't the press beginning to suffer...

RIVES: We lost two or three people, yes. You see, they were so used to the War in Vietnam... When they went out there they went out in military convoys; they were protected by the American Army, and helped out... When they came to me, I told them, “Don't go out there, you're being foolish.” Well, at the very beginning, the Cambodians, all these young kids, dashed out, full of enthusiasm, and they won a couple of skirmishes.

From then on, it was all downhill. The press went out, and the press got captured and shot. Do you remember, Flynn's son...

Q: Yes, Errol Flynn's son, Sean...

RIVES: Yes, Sean Flynn. He's never been found.

Q: I remember, there was another reporter from the St. Louis paper, a rather well-known correspondent, he wasn't killed. He was captured and somehow got out.

RIVES: One of them managed to escape, I think.

Q: I was at the other end packing up his effects. We thought he was dead. We were getting ready to ship them home, when all of a sudden he showed up...

RIVES: Well, about half a dozen were killed...

Q: Don't you think this also changed the attitude of the press. All of a sudden they were no longer able to sit back and snipe away.

RIVES: Yes. They criticized me for not doing enough about the press, too. [For not] going out and rescuing them. Well, I don't know how I was supposed to do that. It didn't worry me very much. Anyways, that was that part of it.

Right after the Incursion started, Washington kept after me, didn't I want more people? And I said, “No. I'm perfectly able to do it by myself. A small Embassy is better.” Meanwhile, also, I kept getting these messages from CINCPAC by the rear channels, via a full captain who would come up from Bangkok carrying messages to deliver that they didn't want to go through the State channels. So I'd get these things and send messages back. Admiral McCain kept pressing me to accept special communications facilities to communicate directly with him. I said no.

One day, on a Saturday night, I got a message from Marshall Green saying, “A C-141 is arriving tomorrow from Manila with full communications facilities, including operators.” Then at the close, “You will not object.” So I got the message.

All my traffic had been coded — Goodness, I've forgotten what it was coded — something Khmer something. It meant that only the top floor and the President saw it. Marshall Green had to go up and get permission to read it. What I didn't realize at this time, the President and Mr. Kissinger were running everything in Washington.

So, anyways, I was ordered, and this huge plane arrived with all these generators, communicators, everything like that, they were all plunked in my little embassy. (We were instructed, also, to find a bigger building.) From then on, as far as I was concerned, it got more and more difficult. The CIA sent in their own communications thing. And the military sent theirs in. So I had three systems of communications, none of which spoke to each other, all operating in this tiny embassy. I really didn't know what the other people were sending. I kept getting messages from McCain about the back channel, and I refused to use it. He'd send me these outrageous messages, and I would reply through the State Department channels so that Marshall Green...

Q: What was he trying...

RIVES: Well, McCain was trying to help, but doing things that I didn't want done. He wanted military advisors. He wanted his special representative from his headquarters on my staff, which I wouldn't have. So I would reply to him through the open channel, through the State Department so Marshall Green would see what had been going on. It infuriated McCain to the point where he sent Ambassador Koren, my ex-boss in Brazzaville, who was then POLAD in CINCPAC, to see me, accompanied by an admiral. I must say, they were very nice, both of them, we had a very nice visit, and Barney Koren let me know very clearly that I was really getting into trouble if I opposed Admiral McCain. Well, I did.

I wouldn't give in. He never got his special [representative] there. But things were getting more and more difficult.

I had another long talk with Lon Nol one day, at his request. He asked me for a lot of things, again. I did a foolish thing, in a way. I laid down the law to him, according to what I thought. I told him what the Nixon Doctrine was, and we were going to help him, as I had repeated before, but he was not going to get all this stuff. My mistake, then, was that I reported this to Washington verbatim. Within 24 hours, General Haig arrived.

Q: He was with the National Security Council, Kissinger's Deputy.

RIVES: Yes. He arrived with an interpreter, a young Army major from Saigon who could hardly speak French, and he went to see Lon Nol, and he refused to allow me to accompany him, which undercut my authority. I never did know what he said to him, completely. He came back and sent a telegram, which I was allowed to see. He said Lon Nol had burst into tears, which I had a hard time believing, but maybe he did.

I have always felt that from that time on, it didn't matter what I said, I was not really believed in Cambodia. I think he went in there with orders, and he may not have promised B-52s, but he probably told Lon Nol, “Don't pay any attention to what Rives said. We'll back you up, don't worry about it, we'll take care of you,” and all that kind of stuff, you know... Anyways, after that, it was much more difficult, because, as I say, I don't think I was believed when I said that they weren't going to get things.

Before he went, I remember Haig said to me, “What do you think we should do about Cambodia?”

I said, “I think we should help them just the way we're helping them now, but if they can't do it alone, we should let them go down the tube.”

He was furious! “What do you mean?!”

I said, “It isn't that I don't want to help Cambodians. I think if they can't do it themselves, we should let them go and be beaten. We're trying to fight communism in Southeast Asia, I understand that. But in Africa, when the Russians lost Guinea, they pulled out. They faced facts. We should do the same thing here if we have to.” Of course, that didn't go over very well.

So anyways, after that, more and more staff came. We got a larger building. And it became more dangerous, of course. The Viet Cong were fairly close.

Q: When you say Viet Cong, who are you talking about? The North Vietnamese army?

RIVES: Yes. What they had done was pull back from the frontier until they got really quite close to Phnom Penh. Of course, the Cambodians then attacked them and got beaten like mad. It was about this time, also, that they started bringing in the Khmer Rouge. At that point we really started hearing about them, and they started playing a role in the fighting. But we didn't have any idea how badly things would go.

Finally, in the autumn, I was informed that an ambassador was coming, Emory Swank. I was asked to stay on as DCM. Usually when an ambassador comes, you know, he brings his own DCM, but I got a personal message from Marshall Green asking me to stay on, so I agreed to that. Coby Swank arrived and we settled in. He took over my house, and I got a new one. That kind of thing. Things were going on fairly well. The Embassy kept growing and growing. An AID expert came in and came out with a perfectly ridiculous recommendation for aid, which, I must say, I felt a little ashamed of myself, but as soon as this AID man had gone with his huge recommendation, I wrote a letter to Marshall Green saying it was ridiculous, he shouldn't get half of what he recommended, and I must say, Marshall agreed with me.

After Coby Swank had been there about two or three months, I was suddenly informed that I was being transferred to Washington. I didn't understand why. Meanwhile, I forgot to say, what led up to all this, I must backtrack...

Before the Ambassador was appointed, Vice President Agnew came out on a visit, a one-day visit. He arrived, and, of course, the military were all panicking about security. An advance party of Secret Service people came, who set everything up, and the CIA man, through his connections, actually got us permission to sweep the Presidential Palace. Can you imagine that happening in Washington? Anyways, they swept the Presidential Palace, at least most of it. When the Vice President came, I was at the airport. We all met him. They wouldn't allow him to ride in a car, so we had our Hueys...

Q: Helicopters, yes.

RIVES: He sat in the middle, the Secret Service man sat on his right, and I sat on his left, so that if anybody shot, they'd have to shoot through us. There was a man on the machine gun, you know. There was no room, so my legs were hanging out in the open... Anyways, we flew in and landed at the Presidential Palace, there was an honor guard, and all that kind of stuff. Then, we went in to have our meeting, and we went into a room which hadn't been swept. Well, of course, I didn't know which rooms had been swept. The Secret Service pushed Lon Nol and me out of the way, dashed in, guns at the ready. If anybody was in there, they were going to shoot him. Then we were allowed in and we had our conversation.

Then we went out to have a State luncheon. There was a U-shaped table. At the head were Lon Nol, the Vice President, and, I suppose, the Foreign Minister. I was just round the corner. We were having lunch. There were no Cambodian security men allowed inside the dining room, only our Secret Service people and the servants. Right behind the Chief of State and Agnew were sliding doors, which were closed; in front of these was a man with a submachine gun pointing at Lon Nol's back. I summoned the Secret Service man

over and said, “This is going too far. Get rid of that man and do it more discreetly.” So they put a man there with a pistol, and at least it wasn't pointing at his back. Of course, all the other Cambodians could see this. I thought it was pretty incredible.

After the luncheon, I asked [the Vice President] if he wouldn't come and visit the Embassy, you know, raise morale and show the flag. But, no, that was too dangerous, they wouldn't let him do that, so we flew back to the airport and off he went.

So I went back to the Embassy, and I was catching up on my work for the day. I was working about 10 o'clock at night, something like that. Andy Antippas was in the office with me. The Secret Service man came in, stood in front of my desk, and asked me how I felt things had gone. I said I thought they had gone very well. The Vice President had done just exactly what he should have done. He said the right things. (Oh, there had been an exchange of gifts, too, after the luncheon, but the Secret Service had been so anxious that we had never got to give ours. The [Vice President's party] had just left them. They picked up theirs but then just dumped ours.)

Anyways, the Secret Service man kept pushing me, and finally I said to him, “Well, if you want to know, I thought you were a little too much of a presence, too obvious.” And I explained this thing about the Uzi submachine gun. Then the man started [ranting], “Why the hell do we need to do anything with these little bastards! They're using us... We're protecting them...” and all that kind of stuff.

I said, “You know, it goes both ways. They're serving our purpose, and we're serving their purpose. All this protecting thing... I wasn't worried about the Vice President. You can't believe that the Cambodians would let anything happen to the Vice President of the United States, on whom they depend for everything. That's the least of my worries.”

The conversation went on in this way for quite a little while. I have an unfortunate habit, I think, when sometimes I want to be rude, I can be. And so I decided it was enough conversation. So I started reading my papers again. I had my glasses on, and I looked at

him like that, and I went like that, and I cut him off. He stood there, in fury, I gather, and then he left. That was the end of our conversation.

To go forward again, I was removed, got my transfer orders, and it was afterwards that I found out. I got back to Washington, I was assigned as Director of African Affairs in INR, put in exile. I knew something was wrong, but nobody would tell me anything. I found out later what really had happened. I'll cut it short. Andy Antippas worked for me in the Department also. He got more and more vibes about what had happened. And then I called Barney Koren, who was then in the Pentagon, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information, I think. He checked around his [contacts]. Meanwhile, also, Marshall Green had been replaced. He was an Ambassador. Mac Godley was supposed to become Assistant Secretary. He never could get approved, but while he was getting his briefings, he called me in one day. Of course, I had been called back from INR and put in charge of Laos/Cambodia. He said to me, “You're number one on the White House blacklist. I've just been over there, and I've been ordered to remove you. You cannot get any posting in the State Department in which the White House has a say. I don't know what you've done, but you'd better find out and do something about it.”

So I called Koren, and he asked General Dunn, who was Agnew's Chief of Staff. Dunn had been an officer in World War I, in the Artillery, under Barney Koren. So Koren called him, and he confirmed what I had been hearing. What had happened was, when the Secret Service came back, they wrote a report on me in which they questioned my loyalty as an American. So when Coby Swank was on his way out to Cambodia, he stopped and saw the President at San Clemente, who ordered him to remove me forthwith. I don't blame him, and I don't blame Agnew for doing that, because their lives are protected by the Secret Service. They didn't know who the hell I was, so they just removed me.

The two things I resent are, one, the Secret Service had so much power. (This is one of the things... when I would see all these things about police power on the television sometimes, I have a certain visceral sympathy for people in trouble.) The second thing

was my disappointment in the Department. Nobody said anything. I was put in INR. I was “protected”. Marshall Green never said anything to me. Nobody ever said anything to me.

Until I went to see General Dunn. I explained what I had heard had happened, and he said, “That's right.” I said, “What am I supposed to do about it? I'm not going to retire. If worse comes to worse, I'm going to sue.” He said, “You don't have to do that.” Then he called up the Department of State, the Director General of the Foreign Service, and said, “RIVES is clear.”

I came back to the Department, and I ran into Arthur Hummel, who was acting Assistant Secretary, in the hallway. He said, “Oh, Mike, I'm so glad to hear that all's well, that you've cleared things up.”

I said, “Art, did you know about this?”

“Oh, yes, I've known about it.”

I asked, “Did Marshall know about this?” “Oh, yes, he knew about it.”

“Why wasn't I ever told anything?”

“Well, Marshall doesn't like to have unpleasant things like that.”

So nobody was allowed to mention it. Nobody allowed me to say my own [piece]. They just accepted that I had made a mistake. If it hadn't been for Mack Godley, I would never have been able to get another post or promotion.

I've always admired Marshall Green, all my life, and I've served with him and under him. But I must say, that attitude really sickened me.

Q: Yes... A couple of questions back on this, what was your evaluation of Lon Nol?

RIVES: I thought he was a well-meaning person. I don't think he was terribly intelligent. I think the driving force behind him was Sirik Matak.

Q: ...who was the king's cousin?

RIVES: Yes. And who was a very impressive, intelligent man, I thought. Also, quite nice. Very ambitious. Well, Lon Nol eventually pushed Sirik Matak aside. But I don't think he was all that [capable].

Q: What was your impression of Spiro Agnew, the Vice President, the time when he came?

RIVES: Well, he did what he was suppose to do, that was all I saw. He said the right things. He'd obviously been thoroughly briefed. He was following the instructions of the President and Mr. Kissinger. He followed, obviously, the Secret Service's advice about security. I don't think we had two words alone.

Q: When you came back, first you went into African INR. I take it that was just a parking spot for a while, was it?

RIVES: Yes. Well, I don't know what it would have turned out to be. I was there for about two years. Then Marshall Green called me down and assigned me to Laos/Cambodia Affairs.

Q: You took that over when?

RIVES: Let's see... I came back in '70. It must have been about '72/'73.

Q: And how long were you there?

RIVES: In Cambodian Affairs? Until after the fall... until '75.

Q: When you took over there from '73 to '75, can you talk about how we saw things in Laos and Cambodia?

RIVES: Things were getting pretty desperate in both those countries by then. Charlie Whitehouse was Ambassador in Laos. Coby Swank, at the beginning, was Ambassador in Phnom Penh. Then he was removed, and Enders became Charg# and after that, Gunther Dean became Ambassador. I think the overall attitude was to try to do everything we could to help Cambodia.

For a while, when I first took over as Director, Bill Sullivan was Deputy Assistant Secretary in charge of that area. He had a special group, which consisted of military, State people, NSC people, and others. For a while Mark Pratt, who was the Lao desk officer, used to go to these mysterious meetings, which I didn't know anything about. One day I questioned him, and I was told, “It's restricted.” Then I went to see Bill Sullivan. I said, “Here, I am Country Director, and I don't know what my staff is doing. I'm not allowed to know. I'd like to have a transfer. I'm not interested...”

So that stopped that. I went to the meetings, where I found out what our policy was, more or less, which was going all out, supporting [Laos and Cambodia]. It was interesting, because I found out how military equipment got there, who did what to whom, you know.

That went on for quite a while, and then towards the end, the bombing got worse and worse. Enders called in more and more B-52s, that kind of thing, which I thought was a mistake. When John Gunther Dean took over, of course, it was very much towards the end, and he came in with several suggestions. Meanwhile, we churned out papers, and a couple of times I prepared papers, hopefully to go to the NSC, and they'd get as far as Phil Habib, who was Deputy, and Phil would call me in and say, “Forget it!” They were papers suggesting various courses of action, like negotiations, things like that, trying to stop the war and everything like that. The NSC policy was to, well, to keep things going.

One incident that occurred during my Washington stint concerned the so-called “Mayaguez incident”, when the SS Mayaguez was captured by Khmer forces off Cambodia. I was called in the middle of the night, tried to find someone in the Pentagon to see if help could be sent but failed. Upon Secretary Kissinger's learning of the matter, he tried to accuse me of inefficiency, etc., but had to recognize I had done all I could. In any case, the Marines eventually retook the vessel with a lost of life.

As an aside, I might say that famous book, Sideshow, by Shaw Cross, hit the nail right on the head, in the title: Cambodia was a sideshow. Everything that was done there was to help Vietnam. They didn't really care what happened to Cambodia.

Anyways, when Dean took over, and it really got bad, he came in with a plan, and he said, “We've got to have peace. We've got to negotiate. We've got to talk to Sihanouk.” Which I had recommended a couple of times before, but I'd been told, “It won't go.” But this time, since it came from the Ambassador, and things were really getting desperate, he was summoned back to Washington. They had a meeting in the Secretary's office. I was allowed to take notes. I was told that I was to take notes; I was not to speak.

And so I went up there. There were the Secretary and Habib and Dean, and, I guess, Ingersoll, who was Under Secretary at that time, and myself. Mr. Kissinger got up and greeted everybody, shook their hands, except me. He never looked at me. We sat down, and the meeting took place, it was an interesting meeting. The decision was made to try (of course, it was too late by then) to get hold of Sihanouk and see if he'd talk to us. We then got up and left. Again, the same procedure. Everybody [but me] got a handshake goodbye. Kissinger never looked at me. I was the country director, supposed to be running things, you know... Never spoken to, never allowed to speak. (Of course, I was used to this, because I had been through this with Mr. Kissinger at the UN when he talked to a Chief of State.)

We went on, and, of course, Cambodia fell. John Dean came back in my office — we'd known each other since Laotian days, old acquaintances, if not friends. He had his suitcase filled this thick with Eyes Only cables, which he carried by hand.

Q: Henry Kissinger, by this time, of course, was Secretary of State. In a way, you were sort of persona non grata with the NSC, hence Henry Kissinger.

RIVES: But he treated people like this all the time.

Q: I'm surprised you were kept on, rather than...

RIVES: But I had cleared my name, you see. Dunn had apparently said the right things...

Q: That might have been the Secret Service. But you were advocating negotiations, doing something.

RIVES: He never saw those. I wasn't allowed to submit them.

Q: Was there the general feeling that whatever you did really didn't make any difference?

RIVES: Very little

Q: There just wasn't that much interest.

RIVES: It was just hold the line, I suppose. Do whatever we could...

Q: Were we beginning to get a better feel for what the Khmer Rouge was like?

RIVES: Not until the really end, no. They were doing very well... they turned out to be better fighters than anyone thought they would be. The French had always told me they thought the Cambodians could be the best troops in Indochina, if properly led and trained.

Better than the Vietnamese, they felt. But there was no indication there would be that slaughter after the fall of Phnom Penh.

Q: Did we see Sihanouk as being a viable alternative during this period?

RIVES: I don't think so. Well, I think John Gunther Dean thought that he was a good guy to talk to.

Q: But policy-wise, at least, we had written him off?

RIVES: Oh, I think so.

Q: You were mentioning Henry Kissinger at the UN. When was that?

RIVES: It was when Kissinger was Secretary of State. I took him in to see an Indonesian, Suharto perhaps. It was the same procedure. I was instructed to take verbatim notes, but not to speak.

Q: Was this just Kissinger treating underlings this way?

RIVES: Oh, yes.

Q: This wasn't that you were on somebody's list.

RIVES: No.

Q: When Cambodia and Laos fell, in the spring of '75, what happened then, what did you do?

RIVES: Marshall Green, very kindly, had spoken to Phil Habib, and Phil had spoken to David Newsom, so I was sent out to Indonesia as DCM.

Q: You were in Indonesia when?

RIVES: Three years, '75 to '78.

Q: Let's talk about Indonesia, '75 to '78. Who was the ambassador?

RIVES: David Newsom to begin with, then Ed Masters became ambassador at the end, just the last two months.

Q: How did we view Indonesia at that time?

RIVES: We viewed it very favorably, as an important country in the region, and as concerned the United States. Our only problem in Indonesia, really, was the human rights one. We always were applying pressure on the Indonesians to release prisoners who had been held since the Suharto overthrow.

Q: By this time, did we view the communist influence as having been pretty well purged?

RIVES: Oh, yes.

Q: How did we view, and did you have any relations with, Suharto?

RIVES: Well, the ambassador dealt with him most of the time, although I did sometimes, too, when I was Charg#. I think he's quite an impressive man. The whole government there was very impressive. Of course, the important parts, the economic parts, were all run by what was called the “Chicago Mafia” — Indonesians who had all been educated at either the University of Chicago or the University of California, in economics. They followed a very rigid program according to what they had been taught. And it worked.

Q: This was true in Chile, too. The same...

RIVES: Yes, and they did brilliantly. From that point of view, it had gone very well.

Q: What was the economic thrust of the “Chicago Mafia?”

RIVES: It was bringing in foreign investment, some privatization, but much more textbook management of the economy and finances. They had a balanced budget and all that kind of thing, and they did very well.

Q: Were there any major things that you got involved with while you were in Indonesia?

RIVES: Personally, no. The Embassy, as I say, was involved in human rights things, in East Timor, things like that. The only time I had problems in Indonesia was a Congressional visit.

Q: It sounds like you have problems. You think it's an attitude problem?

RIVES: Well, I think it's one of my things, I don't back off. This group arrived, and we, as is usual, prepared a program for them, on their instruction, and they never approved it. It wasn't until they left Bangkok on their way to Indonesia that they got on the radio to me, from the plane, saying, “We're coming to Indonesia as a rest stop.” This was on a weekend, of course. The entire government of Indonesia... Indonesians took their weekend seriously. They didn't have any receptions or anything on weekends. I had gotten the Government of Indonesia to work on this weekend to meet with these people. And I was told they weren't interested, they were going shopping. So I'm afraid I was a little annoyed, and I said that was impossible. Finally, they came back and said they'd agree to meet a limited number for fifteen minutes, so I said no, I'd rather cancel it, so I did cancel, by letter to everybody, sent by special messenger.

What they did want was a briefing on Sunday morning by the Embassy. So on Sunday morning, we started at nine o'clock. At one o'clock we were still going. Every section chief had his say, and the AID mission and everything. But it was mostly spent by the Congressmen attacking the Embassy and the U.S. Government for our attitude towards Indonesia. We were doing too much, we were wasting money, all that kind of thing. We listened...As I say, this went on for four hours.

Finally, I had had enough, so I stood up, and I said that I appreciated their visit... visits like theirs serve two useful purposes: (1) they allow Congressmen to see a new country and get the point of view of the country they are visiting, and (2) it also allows the country visited to get the point of view of the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Government firsthand. “But,” I said, “Things work both ways.” In this particular trip they had been extremely rude to the Indonesian Government by casting aside all the plans that had been made; had been extremely rude to me and the Embassy by not answering our cables; and I and everybody in my Embassy had just been accused of being a crook. I didn't accept that — I didn't take that positively. I said, “I want you to remember that we pay your salaries, just the way you pay my salary. This is the end of the meeting.”

They were perfectly furious. After I left, they demanded to see the exchange of cables, which proved that they were in the wrong. I was giving a large reception for them that evening, and the State Department escort officer called me and asked, “Do you still want us to come?” And I said, “Certainly. I want one thing understood, though. If the Indonesians come, and I'm not sure anybody's going to come, I don't want to see a single American speaking to another American. I want you to let the Congressmen know that.” I also asked him, “By the way, what are you doing on this trip? You are a useless appendage. Why didn't you see that those cables were replied to?” So I wasn't very popular there, either.

So they came, and it turned out to be a very good evening, because they all spoke to the Indonesians, they really made an effort. Ambassador Newsom returned from Washington, where he had been on consultation, the next day. I told him what had happened, and he said, “Well, I don't want to say anything, but you'd better pack your bags!” But nobody said anything.

Q: What happened?

RIVES: Nothing. They knew they were in the wrong. I wasn't going to back up. I would have sent an honest report. I was mad as hell.

Q: Something that was of great concern to the United States and particularly to Australia, but also to other places, was the situation in East Timor. How did we deal with it during the time you were there, '75 to '78?

RIVES: We kept exerting pressure to be more open, let the press get in and see... We never got there. David Newsom never was able to go there. But it was just putting on pressure. It wasn't only on our part. The Dutch were very hard on them, too, and so were the Japanese, and the British, and the French, all the Embassies really pushed them a lot. All we were successful in doing, thanks to this, we got, I would say, about 90% of all the prisoners released who had been kept since the overthrow of Suharto. They did it a hundred thousand at a time, or something like that... it was huge numbers. Because of the pressure, they did release almost all of them.

Q: What would we do? We'd go and say..

RIVES: Continuously. And threaten to cut off aid. And these Congressional visits were useful, I think, because they'd raise it every single time. Then the Ambassador could follow it up and say, “Look, you've heard them. We've told you the same thing. Now you've got it from the people who give you your money.” That's always effective.

Q: You left there in '78, and then what?

RIVES: Diplomat in Residence at Rollins College in Florida.

Q: Sounds like a challenging assignment.

RIVES: It was very pleasant, for a year. And then I was up for another assignment and was asked what I would like. I said I would like an Ambassadorship, since I'd been Charg#

something like five times. I was told they would “do their best.” So then they called back and said, “We keep sending your name up and it keeps bouncing back.” So I said, “Try again!”

Finally the poor guy in Personnel called me one day and said, “We just can't get anywhere with you as an Ambassador. Won't you accept something else? Maybe a Consul Generalship or something.” So I realized I wasn't going to get an Ambassadorship, so I said, “All right. But there are two conditions: (1) it's got to be comfortable, and (2) it's got to be interesting.” So he said, “What about Karachi?” I said, “That's interesting, but uncomfortable. The answer is no.” They finally came up with Montreal, which I accepted.

Q: So you were in Montreal from when to when?

RIVES: '79 to '81. I retired from there. It was during the Referendum. That's why they wanted me there, because the Consul who had been there was a very good Consular Officer, but he'd never sent a political report in, so he didn't have any idea what was happening.

Q: This was the referendum on the independence of Quebec.

RIVES: Yes, the first time. They're going to do it again this year, probably.

Q: How did we view it at that time?

RIVES: We were against it. Of course, we were neutral. But I must say this of my Consulate staff, we told the Department within two percentage points what the result was going to be.

Q: Did you find you were a little bit like the Coup officer in... I mean, if there's anything we want to stay neutral on, this is it... that you couldn't nod, you couldn't shake your head, you couldn't do anything...

RIVES: Well, that's true. But I had very frank exchanges with both sides. They were both willing to talk to me, give me their point of view.

Q: What was our appraisal? Were we talking about: if Quebec went, what this would mean?

RIVES: Yes.

Q: What did we feel about this?

RIVES: I don't think I had an opinion from Washington about this. My own opinion was it was absolutely stupid. I said that to one of the people one day when we were really off the record. What would happen, even today, even if they broke relations amicably, which is what they think they're going to do? They kept saying to me, “Well, if worse comes to worse, we can always ask to join the United States.” I asked, “Are you sure we want you?” (You know, don't we have enough problems...?)

Where I told them they were being foolish was, if Quebec came in tomorrow — Quebec, I think, could survive alone. It's got a lot of natural resources, and able, intelligent people, they're very well educated, it's not an undeveloped country — but, as I said to the man, “What you'll become in Quebec, you'll become like Senegal. You'll be a small, unimportant country. As long as you're part of Canada, you're one of the two most important provinces in Canada, and you're part of Canada, which is one of the five big powers in the economic sphere. If you break up Canada, Canada will be nothing, and you'll be even less than Canada. If that's what you want, fine. But I think, again, that the polls show it... when it comes down to the nitty gritty, the Canadians will vote with their pocketbook.”

Q: I would imagine that being up in Montreal during this political situation, you would find yourself... there were so many connections with Canada that really had nothing to do with the Federal Government.

RIVES: Well, that's right. Those didn't affect it at all. The American businessmen stayed there. After all, Mulroney, who became the next Prime Minister after I left there, and by the way, I introduced him to the Embassy — the Embassy had never heard of him until I made them meet him, because I felt he had a future, and he was the representative of Hannah Corporation — those relations were all right.

The main problem we had with Canada was El Salvador. The Canadians were violently against us, especially the Quebecers and the Church. I was always being attacked by the Catholic Cardinals. I was once asked to give the U.S. position on El Salvador, which I reluctantly agreed to do on condition that I would just read a statement giving U.S. policy, which I cleared with Washington to be sure I had the right line. That was one of the most interesting evenings I had in Quebec, because I was on a platform with six or seven people, including the leader of one of the opposition parties (not the liberal, one of the small ones, whatever it was called) who had just returned from El Salvador. I wouldn't debate with him, because I hadn't been in El Salvador for twenty years. They had representatives from the opposition in El Salvador, and they had Canadians, and everybody had his turn to talk, and they were all anti-U.S. First of all, they opened with a film which was absolutely outrageous, a film about human rights violations by the United States in El Salvador — it was absolutely outrageous.

So then, finally, last of all, I was asked to get up. Well, there were hoots, cat calls, screams, yells, boos, you know. I got up to the podium, and I speak French, so I said to myself, “I'll give it to them in French.” It took quite a while for it to quiet down, then I started off, and I gave them the official position, then boos, catcalls, you know. Then I sat down. In the question and answer period, the guest of honor was asked about three questions, and then everything was turned to me. I didn't really want to get involved, but I got up there because they'd asked something ridiculous, I can't remember what. I stood up there for two hours answering questions.

In front of me were Americans who had gone to Canada rather than go to Vietnam. One of those guys (I knew who there were) got up and asked me a perfectly ridiculous question, and I said to him, “I'm not going to answer you. You're a traitor to your country. You shouldn't even be allowed in here. Sit down or get out!” Boos and howls and screams!

I went upstairs after this. I was exhausted. My PAO was there, who hadn't done anything. I said I needed a drink, so we went in the bar. We sat down at the bar, and then all the opposition came in at the other end. I was sitting there quietly, and all these young students came in, and they said, “Could we sit with you? We were so interested to hear the other side.” So I had another round with those people. It really was a fascinating evening.

Anyways, then Washington asked (my tour was coming to an end, but there was a new Ambassador) if I would stay on. I said, “What do I get after this?”

“What would you like?”

“An Ambassadorship.”

Then we went through the same thing. They said, “We'll give you a Consul Generalship.”

I said, “I've had it.”

“Country Director?”

“I've done it.”

All those. Then I said, “I'll make it easy for you. I want to be ambassador to France.” Then they accepted my retirement.

Q: Well, Looking back on it, what gave you your greatest satisfaction of your career?

RIVES: I don't know, I enjoyed every post in a different way. You know, they were all different, all interesting, some were unpleasant, some were not. There were a few things that I said that I regretted. I got two awards, one after Cambodia, one after Burundi. They were both given to me, I think, in lieu of promotions or anything else. The Cambodian one I think was sort of sad. I was in INR then, and I was told to go down to... Well, it was written up by Tom Corcoran, and it was a beautiful commendation, and when I got it, it was down to one line. They'd taken all the praise and everything out and said, “For service in Cambodia,” something like that. I was asked to go down and have it given to me by Johnson. I walked in there with some of my friends from INR who came down with me. I walked in there, he stood up, handed it to me, shook my hand, and that was it.

Q: This was President Johnson?

RIVES: No, Alex Johnson.

Q: Tell me... What was it? Sometimes you find out after you leave... There were different Administrations? Were you just too opinionated or too strong a person, or what do you think?

RIVES: I just didn't play the game, I think. I didn't polish apples. I did what I thought was right, and I think in most times it was right. In some places, like in Cambodia, I was just on the wrong side. I never recovered. I've never asked to see my confidential file, but I'm sure there are black marks in there right and left. You know. But I had the satisfaction of doing what I felt was right. I'm never going to apologize for it.

Q: Well, I think you can rest assured, I think anybody who's in the profession appreciates the fact that you said what you were basically paid to say. I'm putting it in the correct context: you are paid to give your best and your honest opinion.

RIVES: A person who did very much the same thing I did was Tom Corcoran. He finally made Ambassador. After having served in Vietnam. In Laos. In Cambodia. In Burundi. He

got Ambassador to Burundi. He finally made it. I remember going to David Newsom when the list came out and expressed pleasure at the fact that finally Tom had made it. And you know the reaction I got from David Newsom? (Now, I think very highly of David, but he's a party man, I was going to say... Part of the machinery.) He said to me, “I'm not sure he should have gotten it.” I said, “How can you say that? Here's a guy who has taken every post he's been given. He's been Charg# umpteen times in the most terrible posts in the world...

Q: The last man in Hanoi...

RIVES: Yes. “... And you say he doesn't deserve it.” David reluctantly recommended me for Ambassadorship.

Q: I don't know. This is a personal opinion, but I think there's a coldness in the Foreign Service that is unfortunate. And also there...

RIVES: There are cliques

Q: There are cliques. And for the most part, if you don't play the Washington game, particularly, if you spend most of your time outside and don't become staff aide or around the certain power groups, you can have problems.

RIVES: Well, one of my problems was, you see, that I served all over the world. I didn't concentrate. When I left Africa, I could have gone back to Africa, but I accepted Cambodia, and so when my name came up, I'm sure (I don't blame him, either) the Assistant Secretary looked through, and he had a lot of people to pay off... and that was that...

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much.

RIVES: I apologize for boring you.

Q: Oh, no, no.

End of interview